THE TWINS IN THE WEST

DOROTHY WHITEHILL

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"Look!" she exclaimed excitedly, "the sky is all red."
Frontispiece.

The Twins in the West

BY

DOROTHY WHITEHILL

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DEDICATED TO

THE GIRLS WHO LOVE POLLY

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The Twins in the West

CHAPTER I

ON THE WAY

PHYLLIS opened her eyes, yawned and stretched so hard that one of her sharp little elbows poked Janet's shoulder.

"Oh, Phyl, do lie still!" grumbled Janet sleepily, and rolled over on her side.

"I can't help it," Phyllis apologized, "I'm so awfully uncomfortable." "I'm sorry," she said after a pause, but Janet was again breathing regularly, and did not reply.

Phyllis looked up at the berth above her. It was pushed up as far as the curtains would

allow, and as the train whirled along, it looked as though it might come toppling down any minute.

"I almost wish Auntie Mogs had let me sleep up there," she said to herself. "It might have been hot, but at least I could have kicked as much as I liked." People are always sorry for themselves when they have to lie awake with no one to talk to, and Phyllis was no exception.

"I do believe Janet could sleep in an airship," she went on complaining, as she listened to her twin's deep breathing. "She is always willing to talk at any old hour at home."

Her thoughts travelled back over the miles that they had come during the past few days, to the house in the city, and then, as thoughts often do, they turned to the future, and the future for the Page twins was Tom.

"We'll see him tomorrow." Phyllis said the words over and over to herself, until the wheels

of the train took up the refrain and chanted it as they thundered along.

Phyllis and Janet Page were twins. The most remarkable twins in the world. They had not discovered each other until a year before this story opens, nor had they discovered their brother Tom. Now the united family, with Auntie Mogs Carter as the fairy godmother, were doing all in their power to make up for lost time.

At present Tom was the center of their thoughts. They were going out to Arizona to spend the summer on his ranch. They had been preparing for weeks for the trip, and as Phyllis listened to the wheels shortening their journey with every rotation, all chance of sleep left her, and she stared wide-eyed into the darkness beyond the window.

"I'm thirsty," she said at last. Very softly she slipped into her dressing gown that was ly-

ing at the foot of the berth, reached for her slippers, and without disturbing Janet, crawled softly into the corridor of the car.

For an instant the long aisle of swaying curtains confused her, but after a minute's hesitation she hurried to the dressing room and drank four paper cups-full of water.

On the way back she noticed how dark the car was, and realized at the same time that she could distinctly hear several people breathing. The thought came to her that she was the only person in the whole car that was awake. She was not frightened, but the idea made her feel suddenly lonely, and she hurried on. Just as she reached her berth a man on the other side of the curtain nearest her gave a loud and a long snore. Phyllis bolted. Without looking particularly where she was going, she dived into a berth.

"Janet, do wake up," she begged, but instead

of Janet's calm voice she heard a muffled scream, and was suddenly conscious that her head was pressed against several hard knotty little objects, and her throat held in a strangle-hold.

The knotty little objects were hair-curlers, and they bobbed in terror while their wearer continued to shriek. Phyllis understood her mistake in a flash, and did her best to reassure the rudely awakened occupant of the berth, but to no avail. Miss Weatherby, for that was the lady's name, refused to be assured. She continued to shriek, and her shrieks brought into the corridor almost every other passenger in the car.

The porter switched on the light, and looked sleepily for the cause of the disturbance. Other curious heads protruded between the green curtains.

"I am being murdered!" Miss Weatherby announced.

"But you're not," Phyllis denied hotly. "I made a mistake." She pulled the curtains apart as she spoke, and her explanation included the onlookers.

There was an amused chuckle, a disgusted grunt or two, and a sigh that denoted complete satisfaction from the father of a small boy, who during the four days of the trip, had been a marked object of Miss Weatherby's disapproval, then all the spectators returned to their berths, with the exception of Auntie Mogs. She stayed behind to soothe Miss Weatherby, and to offer the apologies that Phyllis seemed incapable of making.

When Phyllis slipped into her own bed, she found Janet with a corner of the pillow stuffed in her mouth, rolling from side to side in a paroxysm of mirth.

Phyllis herself was almost in tears.

"That horrible old lady," she stormed, "I

didn't know I was getting into her berth, I certainly wouldn't have done such a thing on purpose. The very idea of her screaming that I was trying to murder her. She really almost put my eye out with her old hair-curlers."

A fresh burst of laughter from Janet.

"Very well, laugh if you like, but if you dare to tell Tommy one word of this, I will tell him what you said in the diner the first night we were on board the train," Phyllis threatened.

Janet sat up and stopped laughing to look at her. "Phyl, if you ever dare—" she began

Phyllis sat up too, and they looked at one another, both pairs of golden-brown eyes glinting with mischief.

Phyllis switched off the light, and then without another word they both snuggled down and were soon asleep.

The next morning the porter called them rather earlier than usual.

"Phyl, do you realize that we're really going to see Tommy tonight?" Janet demanded, wide awake in an instant.

"No," Phyllis denied emphatically. "The only thing I can think about is that dreadful woman last night. I dreamt I was murdering people in my sleep. I hate to think of facing her this morning."

"Oh, cheer up!" Janet laughed. "Everybody will have forgotten it by now."

CHAPTER II

MISS WEATHERBY

THOUGH her words were reassuring, they were not however true, for when the twins joined Auntie Mogs and went into the diner for breakfast, all eyes were turned towards them.

"I knew it," Phyllis said in an agonized whisper.

Auntie Mogs patted her hand as they seated themselves at the table. She was a dainty little lady with the sweetest voice in the world, and she laughed a soft rippling little laugh. "Dear child," she said, "don't look so unhappy."

"But they're all thinking about last night, Auntie Mogs," Phyllis protested.

"Of course they are, but you foolish child, don't you realize that they, none of them, know which of you it was."

Phyllis' face broke into a broad grin. It was Janet's turn to look worried.

"I'm sure they think it was you, Jan," she teased as she chipped off the top of her egg. "You have a guilty look."

"Then they'll very soon be told differently," Janet remarked with mock decision. "Don't you think for one minute that I'm going to let these people believe that I go about murdering old ladies in their sleep."

"Oh, Janet!" protested Auntie Mogs.

Janet could not reply, for at this moment Mr. Burke and his little boy stopped on their way to their table.

"Good morning, little ladies," he began. There was a twinkle in his eye as he looked from one twin to the other. I hope you both slept well.

"Thank you, we did," Janet and Phyllis answered in chorus.

"No ill effects from last night's interruption?"

"What interruption?" Phyllis asked innocently, while Janet blushed furiously. "I'm such a sound sleeper that I hardly ever wake up."

"Oh, Phyllis!" Auntie Mogs laughed in spite of herself, and Janet looked more uncomfortable than ever.

Mr. Burke looked straight into her eyes that pleaded with him not to believe Phyllis, but he only smiled and, with a nod to Miss Carter, left them.

Janet folded her napkin with precision.

"Phyllis Page," she said, solemnly, "you are a wretch, but I'll get even with you, see if I don't."

"Just wait till we meet Miss Weatherby," Phyllis replied airily.

They met her sooner than they expected or hoped. Just at the narrowest part of the diner, Janet bumped into her, as the train gave a sudden lurch.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she stammered. Miss Weatherby sailed majestically past her without a word.

They found their berths made up when they regained the sleeper and the porter busy with their bags.

"Better be getting your things together, Missy." He was cross-eyed, so that the one word did duty for both twins, as they were both equally sure he was looking at the other. "We'll be getting into Phoenix shortly."

Phyllis nodded smiling, and the next half hour was spent in collecting the numerous possessions that accumulate so mysteriously during a trip.

Auntie Mogs joined them when their packing was completed, and put her arm around Phyllis' shoulder.

"My dear," she said, trying hard not to smile, "don't you think it would be nice if you were to apologize to Miss Weatherby?"

"Oh, Auntie Mogs," Phyllis protested feebly, and she threw a horrified glance towards Miss Weatherby's seat, a Literary Digest held rigidly in her jeweled hands hid her face from view. Then she gave her shoulders a little shrug. She knew there was no need of protesting to Auntie Mogs, for you always ended by doing exactly what she wanted you to.

"Very well," she said quietly, "I will."

But Miss Weatherby made an apology from Phyllis unnecessary.

With a finality that bespoke grim determination, she suddenly put down her magazine, and with a rustle of black silk crossed the car and stood scowling at Janet.

"Young lady," she began, without any opening preliminaries, "you owe me an apology. Your conduct last night was most reprehensible. You gave me a fright which, with my heart in the weak condition that it is in, might easily have proved disastrous. At your age I would never have presumed to have disturbed my elders, and in such a rude fashion, too."

Phyllis was about to protest, but Janet, her cheeks very red, silenced her. She jumped up and faced Miss Weatherby, her eyes flashing.

"I do apologize," she began firmly, "but I want you to understand that I did not do it on purpose."

She looked so very angry that even the august Miss Weatherby was taken aback.

"Very well," she said, striving to maintain her dignity, "I accept your apology." And she retired not without audible sniffs to her own compartment.

Janet sat down beside Phyllis, and her mouth set in a hard little line.

"Jan," Phyllis exclaimed, "whatever made you do such a thing? I'm going straight over and tell that horrid old woman that I did it myself."

"You're going to do no such thing," Janet insisted. There was so much determination in her voice that Phyllis, always the gentler of the two, subsided in a daze.

"Really, Janet dear, it wasn't necessary for you to take the blame," Auntie Mogs said. "What made you do it?"

Janet looked at her for a minute, and then she laughed.

"To tell you the gospel truth, Auntie Mogs, I don't know," she confessed. "I really believed for the minute that I had done it, and," she added with a twinkle in her eye, "I wish to goodness I had."

Phyllis' hand slipped out quickly and caught hers in a firm clasp of understanding. For the next few minutes they looked out of the window. The waste of brilliant yellow sand that had stretched out into limitless space on either side of the track was giving place to rude shacks and occasional trees as they neared Phoenix.

Suddenly Phyllis gave an exclamation of horror.

"Look!" and she pointed towards Miss Weatherby, who was vigorously tying her bonnet strings. "She is going to get off with us."

CHAPTER III

ON THE WRONG TRACK

THE platform of the Phoenix station was broad and dusty and hot. Big men with wide Stetson hats sauntered about, but there were no porters in sight. Auntie Mogs, followed by the twins and the train porter, looked about her curiously.

"You had better put the bags here," she said, pointing to a bit of shade near the telegraph window. "I will go and find out about our train."

"Yas'um," the porter agreed, "right here I'll

put 'em, but you all needn't worry boutin' your train. It's the next one goin' t'other direction. I reckon it ought to be along in a little while."

He left them smiling broadly. Auntie Mogs disappeared into the station, and the twins were left to their first impressions of Arizona.

"It's hot," Janet said.

"Scorching," Phyllis agreed.

They started about them trying awfully hard to like what they saw.

"It'll be better at Tom's ranch," Phyllis said hopefully, as though she had read Janet's mind. But Janet only nodded. Her eyes had traveled to the other end of the platform, where a very large and fat Indian woman squatted regardless of the sun and hawked her wares.

"The old darling!" Phyllis exclaimed as she followed Janet's glance. "You stay here, Jan, I'm going to talk to her and buy one of those ducky baskets."

"All right," Janet replied dubiously. "But she'll probably scalp you. I'm not going to leave the bags."

Phyllis hurried off and Janet, let alone, continued her interrupted survey. She saw nothing that made her feel at home. And her thoughts turned back to old Chester, with its huge green trees, and tidy village streets. A wave of homesickness caught her.

"I do hope Tom's ranch won't be like this," she said aloud.

"Don't you worry, little lady," a voice drawled from so far above her that Janet looked up, expecting to see some one calling from the height of a telegraph pole. Instead she looked into the grinning face of Rusty Savage. As she looked she continued to think of a telegraph pole, for Rusty resembled one as nearly as a human being could. He was almost seven feet tall, and very thin. His dusty trousers were

tucked into high boots, and Janet could think of nothing but the giant of the circus.

"Aunt Jane's Poll-parrot!" was all she could think of to say. Rusty's eyes were almost hidden beneath black brows. He closed one of them now to avoid the smoke that curled up from his cigarette.

"My Aunt Jane once had a poll-parrot," he drawled.

"What was its name?" Janet inquired.

"Julius Caesar," Rusty replied gravely.

Again Janet laughed, and this time Rusty smiled a slow twisted smile, that showed a row of strong white teeth.

"You're not alone?" he inquired, and Janet seeing a chance of playing a trick, shook her head and mumbled something about her Aunt.

Phyllis had grown tired of the Indian woman's "hows" and was coming back to them.

Janet smiled her sweetest smile as she looked up at Rusty.

"Would you mind awfully, watching my bags a minute?" she asked.

"I'll guard them with my life," Rusty replied solemnly. And Janet, without waiting for another word, darted through the crowd, towards the approaching Phyllis.

"Go and talk to him," Janet whispered, pointing to Rusty Savage, whose head was easily seen above the tops of the crowd.

Phyllis nodded. There was no need of further explanation. The twins had played many tricks because of their remarkable likeness, and as Phyllis hurried towards the telegraph window and caught her first glance of the man who was guarding their luggage, she knew that this was going to be the best joke of all.

"Back again," she said, as she dropped down on a suitcase. "Thank you ever so much, for

watching our things." Rusty looked at her curiously.

"Did you find your Aunt?" he inquired. Phyllis shook her head.

"No, I'm afraid she's lost," she said mournfully. "I'll hate being lost in Arizona."

"Don't you worry 'bout being lost," Rusty assured her protectingly. "Where you bound for, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Loophole, to my brother's ranch," Phyllis told him.

"Your brother being—?" Rusty inquired.

"Tom Page," Phyllis explained.

"Tom Page of the Twin Star Ranch?" Rusty whistled. "Well I'll be——" The rest of his sentence was cut short by the sudden arrival of a train from the west, and at the same time Aunty Mogs, followed by a shambling creature in dirty corduroys, hurried out of the waiting room.

An instant later Janet came unexpectedly from behind the pillar. The porter picked up the luggage.

"Hurry along girls, here's our train at last," Auntie Mogs said. And she smiled at Rusty Savage; everyone did smile at Rusty Savage for one reason or another. Phyllis and Janet smiled, too, roguish mischievous little smiles.

"Good-bye, and thank you," they said both together, and a minute later they had boarded the train.

They collapsed into a seat, and between gales of laughter they tried to explain to Auntie Mogs.

"But you mustn't talk to strange men, it's dreadful," Auntie Mogs protested.

"I didn't," Janet denied, "he spoke to me."

"Anyway, he knows Tom," Phyllis laughed.

"Does he really," Janet exclaimed.

"Well he knows of him, anyway. You and

Auntie Mogs interrupted us, just as we were talking about him."

"Too bad, but we did have to catch our train. How did he act when you went and talked to him?"

"Just as if he'd only stopped a minute before."

"Then he didn't suspect?"

"Not until he saw you, for the second time."

"Do you think he guessed then?"

"Sure of it."

"How?"

"Because I saw his face when we grinned at him."

Auntie Mogs had been busy looking out of the window, and she drew the girls' attention to the palm trees that lined the streets and later as they left the main part of the town to the Capital building shining white in the glaring sunshine.

They were so intent on the landscape, that

they did not hear the commotion at the door. But a minute later they turned in surprise to see Rusty Savage towering above them.

"I'm begging your pardon, ma'am," he began addressing Miss Carter.

"Yes?" Auntie Mogs smiled up at him.

Rusty rolled his hat brim around and around in his hands, and looked from Janet to Phyllis and back again.

"I'm begging your pardon, ma'am," he said again, "but one of these young ladies told me you was going to Loophole, headin' for Tom Page's ranch."

"Yes, we are," Mis Carter nodded.

"Well, you're headin' the wrong way," Rusty managed to explain. "This train's headin' for Williams."

Miss Carter looked at him in amazement, and the twins said, "Oh."

"I—I kinda thought I better tell you," Rusty stammered.

"But the man who carried your bags said it was the train for Loophole, and our train porter told us ours was the next train in.

"Mebbe he did, but he was wrong, and as for Mouldy (they knew he was referring to the man in the old corduroys who had carried their bags), he's likely to say anything."

"But what are we going to do?" Auntie Mogs asked in distress.

Rusty grinned sheepishly. "Well, that's why *I'm* here," he offered in explanation.

At this point in the conversation the conductor joined them. He was a little man with sharp features. Beside Rusty he looked ridiculous, but he spoke with a great air of authority.

"I've just been talking with the engineer, Mr. Savage, and he says it's impossible to stop at Hawks Corners," he said.

Rusty turned, squared his shoulders, and looked down at him.

"I reckon I'll have to talk to that engineer," he replied, and there was so much finality in his tone, that the little conductor looked positively frightened.

"I—I don't think that will do any good," he stammered, and turned appealingly to Miss Carter.

"You see, ma'am," he began," it's this way—," but Rusty's heavy hand on his shoulder interrupted him."

"I've already told you how it is, and now I guess I'll have to tell you all over again." Rusty's voice sounded very tired and bored, as he went on explaining. "These folks want to go to Loophole and I'm going to see that they get there." He turned to Auntie Mogs. "My ranch is just outside Hawks Corners and my sister can make you all comfortable. I can get Page on

the wire and we'll find some way of getting you to Loophole. If you go to Williams you'll lose two days, besides being mighty uncomfortable in the hotel there.

"But if the train doesn't stop at your station," Auntie Mogs protested feebly.

Rusty Savage grinned.

"Oh the train will stop all right," he replied quietly. Without another word, he put on his hat and ambled out of the car, followed by the fuming little conductor.

Auntie Mogs watched him go and then turned to the twins.

"Well!" was all she could manage to say.

As for Janet and Phyllis, they were both speechless.

CHAPTER IV

AT SAVAGE'S RANCH

"HELLO, hello, is that you, Tom? Yes I can hear you." Phyllis was shouting into the telephone receiver with Rusty Savage beside her.

They were in the general store and post office at Hawks Corners, for Rusty, true to his word, had stopped the train. He did not tell them how he had persuaded the engineer, but they had learned that force was required. It had been an easy matter to locate Tom on the telephone, and as Auntie Mogs disliked telephones,

and Janet was afraid of them, Phyllis was doing the talking.

"Hello," she called again, and Tom's voice, very far away, came back to her.

"Where are you?" he demanded.

"At Hawks Corners."

"How did you get there?"

"We got on the wrong train."

Tom did not reply for a minute then—"Go to Savage's ranch?" he called back.

Phyllis laughed. "We're with him now."

"Better let me talk to him." Rusty had to almost double up like a jack knife, before his mouth was level with the receiver. He explained everything to Tom and ended with the words, "Reckon they'll be all right with me." Then he laughed at something Tom said at the other end of the wire, hung up the receiver, straightened himself out, and turned to the others.

"Tom will be over for you some time today," he explained. "If you'll come along with me, we'll see if we can't scare up some lunch at the ranch."

They left the store and found a dilapidated buck board waiting at the curb. It was hitched to two of the most beautiful horses that Janet had ever seen, and at sight of them she gave an exclamation of pleasure, and ran to their heads.

"Oh you darlings!" she cried.

The horses scenting a friend and admirer, nuzzled their soft noses against her shoulder.

Rusty watched her grinning.

"Like 'em?" he inquired.

"Better than anything in the world," Janet smiled back.

Rusty nodded in perfect comprehension.

"So do I," he agreed.

They climbed into the wagon gingerly, for its

lack of paint and polish made it look as if it might fall into pieces any minute.

Janet sat in the front seat with Rusty, and Phyllis and Auntie Mogs in the back.

Rusty picked up the lines, and they started off at a breakneck speed, which did not slacken until they reached the Savage ranch house.

Janet did not speak during the entire trip. She sat with her eyes fastened on the horses' ears, her mouth open in an excited little smile, and her eyes shining. Rusty was a wonderful whip, but he realized that he had never exhibited his horsemanship to a more appreciative audience.

On the back seat Auntie Mogs and Phyllis clung to each other in sheer fright, but they tried not to show the terror they felt as they rounded broad, sweeping turns in the road on two wheels.

Great stretches of sand, golden under the sun, melted into the purple mountains in the distance.

The table lands rose sharp cut just ahead of them, silhouetted against the brilliant blue of the sky. Great clumps of catsclaw and greasewood grew close to the ground, and every now and then brilliant clumps of wild flowers gave a vivid touch of color. Giant cactus completed the design. And through it all they bowled along at breakneck speed.

Phyllis felt as if she were having a terrible dream or playing the principle role in a thrilling moving picture drama. Auntie Mogs, when she wasn't too frightened, enjoyed the vivid colors, but Janet never took her eyes off the beautiful pair of black horses.

Rusty's sister, Miss Agatha, as she was known throughout the countryside, came out on the porch as they drove up. She was a tremendous woman; tremendous in every way. Her hands and feet were like a man's. Her mouth was wide, and always smiling. Her heavy iron grey

hair was wound about her head in tight braids. A blue-and-white checked apron covered her ample frame. Only her eyes were small, the lids drawn into a squint, the result of the brilliant sunshine. She pounded rather than walked. She gave a curious impression that she was breathing in more of the air than was her share.

"Here we are, Agatha," Rusty called out as he brought the horses to a full stop beside the porch. Miss Agatha hurried down the steps. Her voice was loud and clear as she answered, "Well now, this is a rare treat. Come right in and we'll have lunch in a minute."

Auntie Mogs would have thanked her gracefully, but she boomed on.

"It's a shame they're letting you get on the wrong train, but lan's sakes, one person's loss is another's gain. I haven't been away from this ranch for nigh over a month, and I can tell you I've been good and tired of Rusty for company."

Rusty had taken the horses back to the corral, so he was not there to defend himself, and Miss Agatha went on.

"We've had a couple of awful sick colts, and I've had to tend them as if they were children."

"What splendid fun," Janet exclaimed.

Miss Agatha looked at her and then at Phyllis, as though she could not be sure whcih one had spoken. She laughed a low rumbling laugh.

"Lan's sake!" she ejaculated, "you two are as much alike as peas in a pod, but come along in and rest awhile. Lunch will be ready in the shake of a lamb's tail."

Auntie Mogs and Phyllis followed her into the house, but Janet slipped around the corner of the porch and joined Rusty as he put up the bars of the corral.

"Good for you," Rusty called over his shoulder. "I thought you'd slip away."

Janet laughed. "I bet you don't know which

twin I am," she laughed.

"Oh, yes I do!" Rusty exclaimed. "You're Janet, and you sat beside me on the drive over, and what's more, you're the first twin that talked to me at the station this morning."

"Now how do you know that?" Janet demanded astonished.

"Never you mind," Rusty told her. "I know, that's enough. I'll never get you mixed up again."

"Don't be too sure," Janet teased.

"Come right into lunch, you two," Miss Agatha's voice interrupted them from the back porch.

Janet cast one last glance at the horses and followed her host indoors.

The dining room of the ranch house was a long cool room with low rafted ceilings. A narrow table ran almost the whole length of it. Straight-back chairs were ranged along the sides,

giving places for ten people. Plain green curtains hung at the window, and gave the room a cool, inviting look after the glare of the sunshine.

Auntie Mogs was already seated at one end of the table, and Miss Agatha bustled Janet into a chair beside them. Rusty took the head. Miss Agatha bumped from the kitchen into the table and back again, bringing in dish after dish of food, until the board fairly groaned, keeping up a cheery conversation meanwhile.

"What time do you think Tom will get here?" Miss Carter inquired, during one of Miss Agatha's trips to the kitchen.

"Well, he was starting right away," Rusty replied, "and I think he ought to get here about four o'clock."

"Then we can't get back to Loophole tonight?" Miss Carter inquired. And Rusty shook his head.

"No indeed, you'll all put up here for the night, and make an early start tomorrow morning."

"It seems a shame to inconvenience you like this," Auntie Mogs apologized.

Miss Agatha heard her as she returned in the room.

"Inconvenience, nonsense!" she exclaimed. "It's a rare treat, I can tell you. I only wish it could happen oftener. We women get a bit lonesome sometimes. It's all right for us old ones, for there's a heap to do to keep us busy. But when I think of girls like Daisy Weaver I fairly boil."

As she spoke they left the table, and moved into the combined sitting room and office, to the right of the hall. There were comfortable wicker chairs and the blinds were closed to keep out the noonday heat.

"Tell us about Daisy Weaver," Phyllis said, as she snuggled into the window seat. Auntie Mogs and Janet waited attentively. Rusty had gone out to the barns.

"Daisy Weaver is a fine girl, though how it happens with a father like hers, I can't imagine. Old man Weaver is the crankiest, stingiest, hardest man in the world, I do believe, and how Daisy stands living out in that miserable shack year in and year out, I can't see."

"Poor child," Auntie Mogs said sympathetically. "Does she never have any company?"

"Company! Lan's sakes, if you could see her father, you wouldn't ask." Miss Agatha replied with some heat: "Why old Weaver would just as soon throw a frying pan at your head if you came in there unexpected as not.

"I wonder if Tommy knows her?" Phyllis said softly. It seemed impossible that he should,

for Tom hated unkindness in any form, and Phyllis felt sure, had he known Daisy, he would have settled her father long before now.

At her question, Miss Agatha looked at her curiously.

"I chance a big guess that he does," she said mysteriously. "They've been neighbors for nigh onto seven years."

Phyllis lifted her eyebrows in surprise,, and they were all silent for a few minutes. A little breeze had swung up. A few minutes later Rusty returned to the house, saying that if they wanted to go out to the barns with him, it was cool enough.

Janet and Phyllis accepted his invitation, but Auntie Mogs insisted upon staying behind to help Miss Agatha.

The girls spent a wonderful afternoon. Phyllis was a little timid at first, but Janet walked straight up to the horses, and talked to them in a language that they seemed to understand.

Rusty saved the smallest colt to the end. It was a sickly looking thing, for its mother was dead, and only Miss Agatha's determination with the aid of a nursing bottle kept him alive.

Janet stroked and petted him, while Rusty explained the nature of its ailments.

"Poor darling," she said. "Isn't he a darling, Phyl?" She looked up from the colt's mane, expecting to meet the eyes of her twin, but Phyllis was not there. She had heard the distant honk of an automobile horn, and at that moment she was flying down the road, towards a very dusty car, that was approaching at top speed.

Tom had come.

CHAPTER V

WELCOME TO TWIN STAR RANCH

"AND here, my dears, is my modest abode."

Tom waved his hand to a distant clump of mesquite. Set in the midst of the green was a one-story building built in the shape of the letter "U." A porch ran all around it, and the graden, gay with a perfusion of flowers, looked as though it might have come straight from a New England village.

Tom stopped the car, on a rise of ground, where they could command a good view. The

Twin Star Ranch was fifty miles nearer the Mexican border than Mr. Savage's place. The mountains crowded around it and in the queer, deceptive light of an Arizona noonday it looked as though you could put out your hand and touch them. It took Janet and Phyllis many days to realize that the table lands were not in reality at the foot of the garden.

"What do you think of it, Auntie Mogs?" Tom inquired, as they gazed in silence at the ranch below them.

"Why, Tom, I'm surprised, I never expected anything so attractive," Auntie Mogs replied truthfully.

"Why not?" Tom demanded laughing.

"I don't know," Auntie Mogs confessed, "but somehow I never expected hollyhocks in Arizona."

"There's a lot of other people that didn't expect them either," Tom laughed. "But I've

found out that with patience and lots of water you can make anything grow on this blessed sand."

"You love it, don't you?" Phyllis asked.

Tom took a long, deep breath, and his eyes roved over the wonderful landscape.

"I do, little sister," he said seriously. "I think the love of it is in my blood."

Auntie Mogs laughed and shook her head.

"I don't think you could quite say that, Tommy."

She was thinking of the tidy village green, in old Chester, so like a Noah's Ark toy village, and the contrast to this great sweep of country made her smile.

"Won't you ever want to leave it?" Phyllis asked a little wistfully."

"Never," Tom replied decidedly.

"I should hope you wouldn't," Janet said

earnestly. "If you did, where would we spend our summers?"

Tom started the car and laughed back over his shoulder.

"Well, I don't know about Auntie Mogs, and Phyllis, but *you* could stay with Rusty Savage and Miss Agatha," he replied.

"Nonsense," Janet blushed a little. "Mr. Savage doesn't know me from Phyllis."

"Oh, but he does!" Tom assured her. "He says it's easy."

"I don't see how," Janet protested.

"He talks about horses and then watches your eyes. He says Phyl looks indifferent, but that your eyes have the same adoring look that a setter pup has."

Auntie Mogs laughed heartily. Many people had found many ways of distinguishing between the twins, but this was the most novel of all.

They rode for a while in silence. At the last

turn of the road Auntie Mogs leaned over and touched Tom on his shoulder. One of his arms encircled Phyllis' shoulder.

"Tom, dear, do use both hands to drive," she cautioned. "It makes me nervous to have you use only one."

For answer, Tom held both his hands over his head, then he turned around and laughed at his astonished aunt.

"Bless your heart," he said, "I haven't been using any hands for the last ten miles. Phyl's been doing all the steering."

"I thought she had been pretty quiet," Janet exclaimed. "It's not like Phyl to keep still unless she's busy."

"Don't annoy the driver," Phyllis called over Tom's shoulder. "If you do I'll ditch you."

Instead of ditching them, however, she made a neat turn and stopped just before the ranch house. At first sight the place looked deserted,

but Tom blew the horn, and a minute later grinning faces seemed to appear everywhere, and a blood-curdling whoop rent the air.

"My family are a rather noisy lot," Tom apologized. "Come along and be introduced."

The six grinning cowboys gathered on the steps as they got out of the automobile. They were all dressed in the regulation outfit, leather chaps, knotted handkerchiefs, sombreros, and spurred boots. Tom singled out the smallest in the group.

"This is Todd Beggs, foreman and general boss. Speak up, Beggar, and say something pretty."

He shook hands, first with Auntie Mogs and then with Janet and Phyllis.

"Glad to know you," he said, trying to overcome his bashfulness, and completely forgetting the speech of welcome that the boys had so carefully drilled into him. "The Twin Star is sure

glad to welcome you," he added lamely. The rest of the men frowned at him, as Tom hurriedly introduced them.

There was Circus Bailey, a roly-poly, good-natured youngster of eighteen; Screw Williams, so called because he resembled a corkscrew; English Kedgeree, an Englishman with delightful manners, and a funny little twinkle in his dark-blue eyes; Jim Martin, a big broad-chested man with a voice as soft as a girl's and last, Sulky Prescott.

Sulky had hung behind the others, dreading the introduction. He was a tall stoop-shouldered man, several years older than any of the others. His face was long and gaunt, and his grey eyes held in their depth the perpetual memory of a tragedy. He shook hands gravely, said a terse "'Do" in place of the regulation how do you do, and while the others stayed at the door he slipped quietly around the house and disappeared.

When Janet and Phyllis were at last alone in their room, they sank exhausted on their bed.

"Oh, Jan, isn't it just like a story!" Phyllis exclaimed. "I have a million things to say to you, and I don't know where to begin."

"I know," Janet agreed. "Doesn't it seem ages since we got off that train."

The twins always talked things over. It was as if they could neither of them decide about anything without first getting the other's opinion. This does not mean that they were alike, however, for they had both decided personalities, but whether they agreed or not, each always understood the other's point of view.

"Of course, they're all darlings," Phyllis said as she opened her suitcase, and prepared to unpack it. "But which one do you like the best?"

"Sulky Prescott," Janet answered promptly, "and after him that nice English Kedgeree. Which one is your favorite?"

"Oh, I like Todd Beggs. He's promised to teach me to drive Tommy's car."

Janet sniffed, "Can't see what you want to drive a car for," she said, "when you've got all Tom's horses to ride."

"But I don't know how to ride a horse."

"Neither do I."

"Well, then—?"

"I'm going to learn."

Phyllis stoped in the midst of her unpacking, and joined Janet, who was looking out of the window at the garden.

"Jan," she said solemnly, a little tremble in her voice, "I'm about to make a terrible confession."

Janet laughed and put her arm around her.

"Goodness me, what is it?" she inquired.

"It's no laughing matter," Phyllis warned her. "I'm deadly serious."

"Well, let's have it."

Phyllis took a deep breath, and might almost be said to have squared her shoulders.

"Jan," she said, apparently with an heroic effort. "Jan, I am desperately afraid of horses, and if I ever have to get on the back of one, I shall die of terror."

"Well," Janet squared her shoulders in turn. "That makes what I've got to say easier."

Phyllis looked at her, puzzled. "What?"

"Yes, I," Janet announced. "I'm just as scared of an automobile, as you are of horses."

"Jan!" Phyllis exclaimed, and they fell into each other's arms and rocked with laughter.

"Hello, is that the way we affect you?" Tom was standing under their window.

"No, Tommy, it wasn't you we were laughing at," Janet replied.

Tom was about to ask another question, but the strident notes of a bugle interrupted him.

"Here that?" he inquired. "That's José. He

was a bugler in our army, and he insists upon calling us to chow that way."

"Who is José?" Janet inquired.

"He's chief cook and bottle washer of the outfit," Tom explained, "and there's one thing he hates above everything else, and that's to have you late for lunch; so unless you want to get into his bad books, you better hustle up."

Janet and Phyllis hastily brushed their hair, and joined Auntie Mogs in the living room. At the door of the dining room they paused. Six shining faces greeted them with uneasy grins, which helped to lessen their own embarrassment.

"I say, stand up, you fellows," muttered English Kedgeree.

There was a sudden scraping back of chairs, and then because it was all so ridiculous, everybody laughed. The ice was broken, and the twins, one on either side of Tom, began their first meal at the Twin Stars.

CHAPTER VI

JANET TAKES A RIDE

"WELL, little sister of mine, what do you think of it all?" Tom inquired of Phyllis, whose eyes had been roving disconstantly about the room for the past five minutes.

Phyllis looked at him and smiled doubtfully.

"It's all awfully nice, Tommy," she began, "but it's sort of *plain.*"

Some of the boys laughed, but for the most part they looked worried.

"What do you mean by plain?" Tom replied.

Phyllis' eyebrows drew together in a puzzled little frown. She had definitely decided that the ranch house must be made more attractive, but she did not want to hurt Tom's feelings by suggesting a change too quickly.

"I mean it might be nicer if there were curtains at the window," she suggested mildly.

"Mr. Savage's house has curtains," Janet put in, quick to follow her twin's lead.

"Guess Miss Agatha is to blame for that," Todd Beggs suggested.

"I don't see why you say blamed," Phyllis protested.

Tom laughed. "Curtains are all very well," he said, "where there is a woman to look after them, but they get pretty draggled and dirty here, and Beggar'd be sure to burn holes in them with his cigarettes."

"Silly things, curtains," Screw Williams growled. "So are rugs, always tripping you up and getting in the way of your spurs."

"What's the use of shutting out the sunlight?" Circus Bailey inquired.

Phyllis looked up and down the table. A decided damper had been put on her scheme. It was English Kedgeree, that came to her rescue.

"Oh, I say," he began, "curtains are not half bad, they really make a room a lot more cheery." He was thinking, perhaps, of the gay chintses in an English home left years ago.

"Can't say I mind them myself," Jim Martin's gentle voice joined in unexpectedly.

Tom looked and the others looked at the two dissenters with disapproval.

"Phyl has about made up her mind to interior decorate us," Tom said. "Let's put it to a popular vote."

Phyllis looked around the table and smiled as her eyes rested on Todd Beggs.

"Do say you want curtains, Mr. Beggs," she pleaded. "Think how pretty the living room

would look, with the soft green matting and bright-flowered chintz curtains."

Beggar looked at her in despair. He didn't want curtains, and the thought of a rug made him turn cold, but Phyllis was too much for him. Her brown eyes pleaded and laughed at the same time, and Beggar had had a little sister once upon a time.

"Of course, I think it will be nice," he said bravely, for it took courage to face Screw Williams' eyes.

"Victory," Phyllis laughed.

"No you don't," Tom protested, "that makes three on a side, and we haven't heard from Sulky yet."

Phyllis looked across the table at Janet, her glance said as plain as words, "You ask him."

Janet looked down the table. Sulky's head was bent over his dish, and not a flicker of his eyelash showed that he had heard one word that Tom had said.

"Mr. Prescott," Janet called, "you're going to support us, aren't you? Phyllis wants to make this house more attractive, and cheerful," she went on to explain, taking for granted that he had not bothered to listen to the conversation. "Your vote will decide. Think what fun we'll having doing it, and please say you think it will be nice," she ended with a smile, that was so full of confiding friendship, that Sulky Williams was for the first time within the memory of a man thrown off his guard. He even smiled as he replied—

"All right, little lady, tie all the pink bows on you want to, and I promise to like it." Then because he was rather startled himself, he bent his head farther over his dish, and lapsed into profound silence.

The rest of the men stared at him in amazement, and Tom leaned over and patted Janet's hand.

"I think Phyllis ought to let you choose the design," he said chuckling.

"Oh," Janet replied airily, "as for that we'll be sure to choose the same one."

Luncheon was over, the men pushed back their chairs, and left the room to return to their several duties.

"Wander about the place, and get acquainted," Tom said as he left them, "but don't go too far away."

"Why not?" Phyllis demanded.

"Well, we're near the border for one thing," Tom replied seriously, "and although the Mexs have a pretty grave respect for us, they might not go so far as to include you. They're rather crazy on the subject of ransoms, you know, and you wouldn't like to be kidnapped by a gang of bandits."

Phyllis stuttered, but Janet tossed her head in the air.

"It might be rather a lark," she said.

She and Phyllis went back to their room, but Auntie Mogs detained Tom for a minute.

"Do you think there is real danger, Tom?" she inquired.

Tom slipped his arm around her waist.

"Not a bit of it," he said laughing, "but I thought that if I scared them straight off, they'd be careful in the future, and I wouldn't like them crossing the border."

"There really are bandits, then?"

"Quite a few."

"Would they venture on our side of the line?"

Tom laughed.

"They would not," he replied decidedly, "not on the Twin Stars, at any rate. You see, when the government turned me down for war service, because of an enlarged heart, it was the silliest excuse they could think of—." Tom

spoke as though the government had exercised a strong imagination in his case, and indeed to look at him it would seem as if they must have, for he looked the picture of robust health.

"They were kind enough to tell me that I would be of great service in patrolling the border," he went on in an aggrieved voice. "Well, I've patrolled it, and I used to get so mad thinking of the good time I was missing, that I'm afraid I made it rather hot for the Mexicans. Anyway, they leave us alone, with flattering persistence."

"I'm glad of that," Auntie Mogs said with a sigh of relief, but in her heart there lodged a tiny germ of uneasiness, and she determined to keep the twins in sight as much as possible.

This proved to be a difficult task at the very outset, for when she went to find them, they were not in their rooms, nor yet on the veranda. Auntie Mogs returned to her unpacking.

"They will hardly get into trouble the first day," she said, and she went about her task with a serene smile. She had reckoned without knowledge of Janet.

As soon as lunch was over, Janet had slipped out to the corral. Most of the men had disappeared. She could see them loping along out towards the ranges, only Sulky Prescott remained. He was busy mending a piece of leather.

"Mr. Prescott," she began without preamble, "I want to learn to ride horseback. Will you teach me?"

Sulky regarded her moodily.

"Not much time," he replied ungraciously, for he was not to be taken off his guard again.

Janet, however, was not abashed.

"I don't think it will take much time," she said frankly. "I'm pretty sure I could ride, if I just had a chance. I can drive," she added, by way of persuasion.

"Humph," Sulky grumbled. "Everybody thinks that at first."

"Well, trying is a good way to find out if you're wrong, isn't it?"

Sulky looked up from his work, and their eyes met, his steely grey ones and her soft brown ones. For the second time that day he smiled.

"Best way I know," he agreed. "When do you want to start?"

"Now," Janet replied coolly. "Wait for me a jiffy." She disappeared into the house. Phyllis was not in their room, and Auntie Mogs did not hear her, so she changed into her brand new riding habit without having to give any explanations and hurried back to Sulky.

"Dude clothes," he said discouragingly, when he saw her, and indeed, her spotless white linen riding habit and shining black boots looked out of place in this desolate country.

"Sorry," she apologized, "but they'll have to do until I can get better ones.

Sulky looked at her again, this time in close scrutiny.

"It'll get dirty," he warned her.

"That doesn't matter," Janet laughed, "it'll go into the tub."

As all his possible objections were ruled out, Sulky got up slowly, and entered the corral. He singled out a big black horse, and without a word of explanation saddled him with a heavy Mexican saddle, mounted him, and started to ride away.

"You wait there," he called back over his shoulder, and Janet nodded happily.

He was not gone many minutes, before he returned leading a much smaller horse by a guide rope.

"This here is the horse your brother wants you to ride. There is another like him up in

the pasture. I brought the gentlest back for you," he added as an afterthought.

Janet covered her mouth with her hand, to hide the smile at the idea of saving the frisky one for Phyllis.

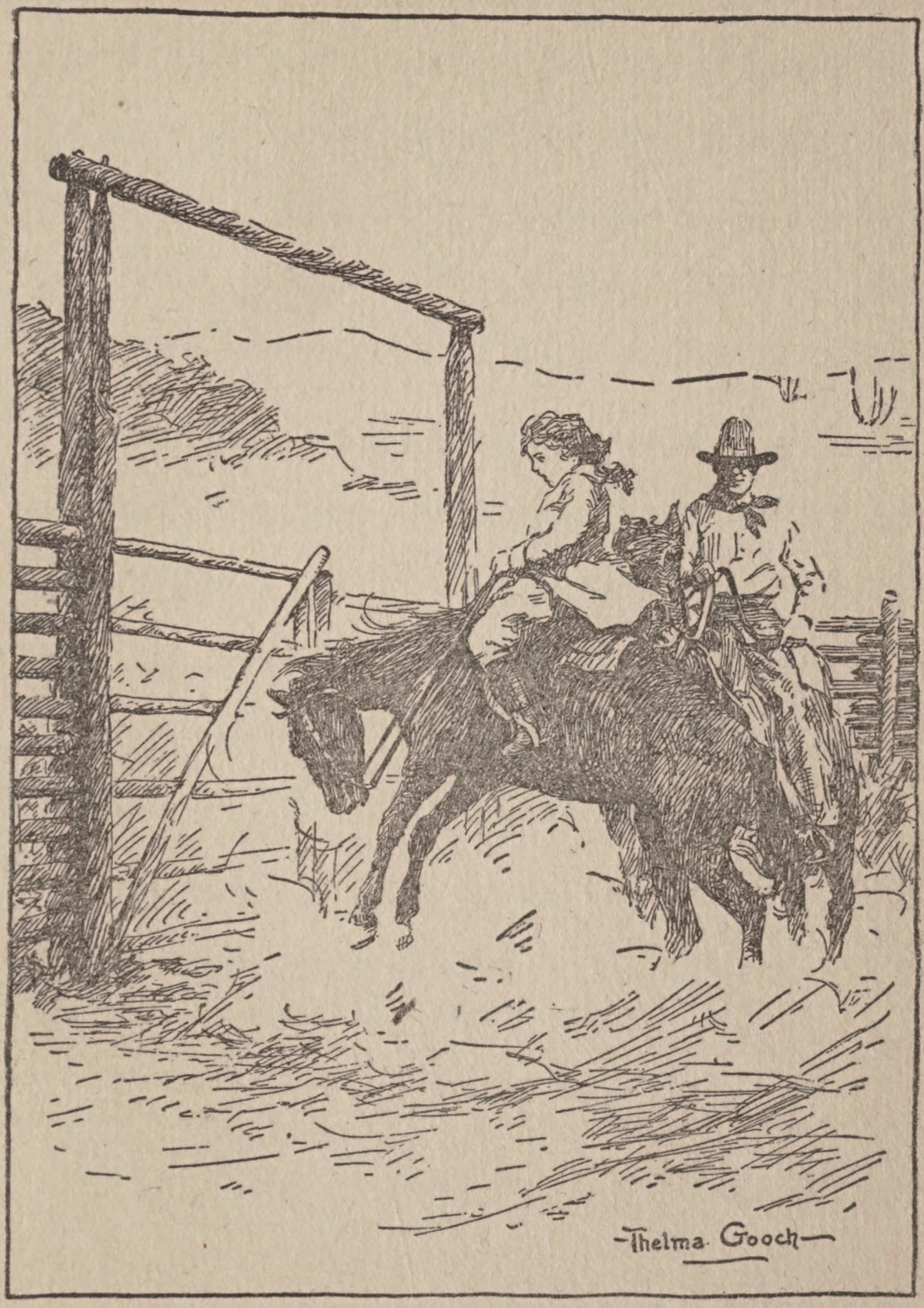
She patted the horse, a dapple grey little animal, with a winsome way of tossing his head.

Sulky saddled him in silence, and Janet's heart nearly stopped beating as she saw the last buckle slipped into place.

"Here you are," Sulky announced, and held one of the stirrups for her.

Janet slipped her left foot into it, and vaulted lightly into the saddle, and gathered up the reins. She had read books, and dreamed dreams about horses all her life, and she was only actually doing what she had imagined herself as doing countless times.

But it is doubtful if any of her dreams came to such an abrupt ending as the actuality. She



She had hardly gotten used to her seat before Sulky let go of the horse's head, and then things began to happen.

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had hardly gotten used to her seat before Sulky let go of the horse's head, and then things began to happen. The horse tossed his head, jumped playfully to one side to avoid a shadow, and threw up his heels in pure joy of being alive.

After that, Janet had only a hazy recollection of what happened. When next she opened her eyes, she was leaning up against th corral fence, and her horse was contentedly cropping the ground beside her. Sulky was looking down at her and laughing. Janet managed to smile.

"He won't do that again," she said gamely, and Sulky's grin widened.

CHAPTER VII

DAISY WEAVER

JANET did not make an empty threat when she said her horse would not throw her again. He never did, and by the end of their first week, she felt so at home in the saddle that it was hard to believe that she had not ridden all her life.

On Saturday morning the men were all exceptionally busy. Auntie Mogs and Phyllis had gone into the little town of Loophole with Tom, and Janet was alone at the ranch with José. She wandered all around the veranda and finally

stopped at the kitchen door. José looked up from the batter he was mixing and grinned at her.

"Those were awfully good pancakes we had this morning," Janet began by way of greeting.

José swelled visibly.

"Not so bad," he agreed. "Me, I make good waffles, too."

"Well they were certainly delicious," Janet said, and then, having exhausted the topic, she asked idly—

"Are there many Indians around here?"

José scowled. "No good, Indians," he grumbled. "My grandfather, he Indian, but just the same I think they no good."

"What's the matter with them," Janet replied.

José shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know, but Mexicans don't like Indians, Yaqui Indians. Other tribes not so bad."

"Well what's wrong with the Yaquis, why don't you like them?" Janet persisted.

José's brow deepened into an even deeper scowl.

"Don't know," he said again, "but if a Mexican sees a Yaqui, he chops him into pieces, and if an Indian sees a Mexican—bah!" The little word was so expressive that Janet did not ask him to finish the sentence. She was not particularly interested, so she changed the subject by asking abruptly—

"José, is the mail box very far away?"

"Three miles. Straight as the crow flies," he told her.

"Guess I'll ride up and see if there are any letters." Janet strove to make her voice nonchalant, but José was not impressed.

"Too hot," was his only reply.

Janet hurried out to the corral.

"Come on, Booster, we're going for a ride," she said.

The twins had named their horses the first night of their arrival. Janet had called her's Boost Star because he had so successfully boosted her on their first encounter. Star was for the ranch, and did duty, as she explained for a surname. The whole had been shortened to Booster.

In like manner, Phyllis' horse was christened Rooster, principally because his mournful neigh resembled the rooster's early morning call. Phyllis had been persuaded to mount him on two occasions, while Beggar let her at a snail's pace around the house.

The pair stood in the corner of the corral, and Janet slipped the halter over Booster's head without any difficulty. Saddling him was not so easy, and she finally had to call on José to help her put on his bit. José wiped his floury hands on his very dirty apron, adjusted the bit, and returned to the house without a word of remonstrance.

Janet mounted, and rode away. It was a glorious morning, earth and sky seemed drenched in yellow sunshine. It was too early to be very hot, and Booster trotted along sniffing the air as though he enjoyed the perfume of the flower's from Tom's garden.

It was not long before the mail boxes were in sight, at the crossroads, and Janet could easily distinguish another horse and rider coming from the other direction, and about equally distant from the boxes with herself.

"See that, Booster," she said, pulling the horse's ears. "Let's race them to the mail box. They won't know they're being raced, but it will be just as much fun for us."

Booster picked up his ears, Janet touched his withers with her crop, and they were off down the broad dusty trail. The rider of the other horse must have known of the challenge, for the other horse gathered himself together, and it was

worth while to watch the two as they approached at a gallop to the mail boxes.

When they were nearly there, Janet recognized that her opponent was a girl, and at the same time that she rode a horse as if she were one with him.

They arrived at the mail boxes almost at the same moment, but the other girl had the advantage. They pulled up their horses and sat laughing at each other.

"Phew!" Janet exclaimed, "that was a race. Did you know I was trying to beat you?"

The other girl nodded. "I saw you talking to your horse," she said, "so I suspected it meant a race. Shambles isn't up to much on looks, but he can run."

As she spoke, she patted the ungainly roan she was riding affectionately. She was a pretty girl, of perhaps nineteen, with a quantity of gold

hair and sky-blue eyes. Janet liked her at once, and was surprised to hear her say—

"I'm Daisy Weaver," and then stop, blushing.

'I'm Janet Page, Tom Page's sister," Janet explained. "I heard Miss Agatha Savage talking about you the other day. My twin and I are coming over to see you," she added smiling.

Daisy's face flushed a deep red.

"Oh no," she breathed rather than spoke the words, and Janet hastened to change the subject.

"Isn't it a heavenly day?" she inquired. "I feel as though I could ride straight into those mountains, especially that funny one with the flat top."

"A good day and a half's ride," Daisy replied dryly.

"Poof!" Janet scoffed," it would only take me twenty minutes."

They both took their mail from the boxes, and

because they could neither of them think of anything more to say, they turned their horses' heads towards their respective homes.

"Good-bye," Daisy said timidly.

Janet held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she replied eagerly, "I hope I'm going to see you soon again."

But Daisy did not answer, and Janet rode home slowly, her brain busy with enumerable questions.

Phyllis and Auntie Mogs, with Tom and English Kedgeree, were all standing on the veranda, as she rode into sight. They greeted her with waving arms, and English came into the road to hold Booster for her while she dismounted.

"Janet, my dear child, where have you been?" Auntie Mogs demanded.

"Oh, just for the mail," Janet replied airily, and she handed her packet to English.

Phyllis laughed and Tom grinned.

"We've only been tearing our hair for the last ten minutes about you," Phyllis said. "Auntie Mogs had you kidnapped by a band of ferocious Mexicans, and I'm perfectly sure, though she didn't say it, that she saw you in a cave, being devoured by wild animals."

"Not quite, Phyllis dear," Auntie Mogs protested. There was relief in her laughter. "But Janet dear, we were a little worried; what made you go off all by yourself?"

Janet had dismounted and was standing on the lower steps, just beneath them.

"Well," she began, looking at Tom, "you all went off and left me, and I had no one to talk to but José. We talked about flapjacks and Yaqui Indians, and then I decided to go for the mail."

"Who saddled your horse for you?" Tom inquired.

"Did it myself," Janet told him with pardonable pride. "That is, all but the bit, and José helped me with that."

English Kedgeree was examining the saddle girth.

"Pretty fine, Miss Janet, I congratulate you. It's a very neat job."

"Great child," Tom said, patting her on the back." I begin to have hopes that you may learn to ride some day," he added provokingly.

"Wait till Sulky hears about it," English laughed. "He'll be no end pleased."

The conversation was embarrassing to Janet, and she turned to Phyllis.

"What did you do in town?" she asked.

"Oh, we had a wonderful time," Phyllis told her.

"What doing?"

"Buying things at the ducky old store. Jan, the man that runs it, is as big as a house."

"Which way?"

"Around and up and down," Phyllis replied, laughing, "and I told him about you, and he's going to give me twelve lolly pops if he can't tell us apart."

"And, Janet dear, we saw the dearest little Indian papoose," Auntie Mogs said. "She was strapped to her mother's pack, and she had the brightest black eyes, they fairly danced."

"How adorable!" Janet exclaimed.

"She let Phyllis play with her, but she scowled if any of the rest of us went near her."

"And when I wriggled my finger at her, she yelled like anything," Tom confessed.

"Well, but Tommy, your hand is so huge!" Phyllis protested, "the poor lamb thought you were going to smother her. No wonder she yelled."

"What else did you do?" Janet inquired.

"Well, I drove the car nearly all the way

home," Phyllis said, after sufficient pause to give weight to such an important announcement.

"Not ran it, but steered it, you mean, don't you?" Janet exclaimed.

"Indeed I don't," Phyllis protested indignantly. "I mean drove it. I managed the brakes, the gears, the clutch, and everything."

"In fact," Tom laughed, "Phyl will soon be bored with an automobile, and the first thing you know, she'll be driving a locomotive."

There was a pause after they had finished laughing. Suddenly Janet said—

"Oh, Tom, tell me, who is Daisy Weaver?"

Tom jumped, as though he had been shot, and the quoit that he had been carrying in his right hand fell to the floor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWINS MAKE A PLAN

"WELL, it's the most mysterious thing I ever heard of," Phyllis said, as she sat on the edge of her bed, while Janet gazed moodily out of the window.

"It might have been an accident," Janet suggested doubtfully.

"Accident? Nonsense, he was the color of a brick."

"And Mr. Kedgeree looked awfully startled, too."

Phyllis sighed in exasperation.

"You say she looks like a nice girl?"

"A perfect peach," Janet replied warmly. "She looks a little tiny bit like Daphne Hillis, but, of course, she's not quite as pretty as Daphne."

Phyllis laughed.

"I don't suppose any one is quite as pretty as Daphne, but don't lets get talking about her, for we'll never settle this knotty problem."

Janet wheeled away from the window.

"I don't know what's to be done," she said. "Tom changed the subject so abruptly, I wouldn't dare ask him again."

"Oh, leave that for me," Phyllis replied with assurance.

The twins always divided up the small adventures of life. To Janet fell the things that took physical courage, while Phyllis managed the difficult interviews. She had a charm that was difficult to deny, and where Janet trembled be-

fore a harsh word, Phyllis smiled sweetly, and walked off with her own way. Sometimes they changed places, and they always managed to fill the other's role with credit, but as a general thing they preferred to stick to their own chosen ways.

Janet did not ask Phyllis what she meant to do, but she watched her leave her room with perfect confidence, that when she returned she would have the answer.

Phyllis, meanwhile, wandered into Auntie Mog's room, and sank down on the window seat. Auntie Mogs was putting away her purchases of the morning. She was quick to notice Phyllis' puzzled frown.

"What's the matter, dear?" she inquired.

"Tommy," Phyllis replied shortly.

"Well, what's the matter with Tommy?" Auntie Mogs inquired.

She knew what Phyllis was going to say, and

she was ready to answer her, for Tommy had followed her into her room from the veranda, and given her the explanation of the curious conduct. Phyllis looked out of the window, and then asked abruptly—

"What made Tommy drop his quoit and turn red when Janet spoke of Daisy Weaver?"

Auntie Mogs laughed lightly, as she replied.

"Poor Tommy," she said. "My dear, I don't think that Daisy Weaver was very nice to Tom, and I'm sure her old father was very rude. He is very unkind to Daisy; you remember what Miss Agatha said." Phyllis nodded.

"But what about Tommy?" she inquired.

"Tom went over to see Daisy. He used to see her very often, but on this particular day she asked him to go home and never to come near her again. Of course, Tom left at once, but I think his feelings were very much hurt. He has never been back, of course, and you can

understand, my dear, that he doesn't like to hear her talked about."

"Hum," Phyllis said slowly. She looked out of the window, and watched the bees circling above the flowers.

Auntie Mogs did not interrupt her, and after a while she slipped through the long window into the garden, and went back to Janet.

"Feel like making a formal call this afternoon?" she inquired casually.

Janet raised one eyebrow. "Daisy?" she inquired.

Phyllis nodded, took down her riding habit from the peg on the door, and began industriously sewing a button on the front of the coat.

"We may get a frying pan thrown at our heads," she remarked a few minutes later.

Janet laughed. "That's all right," she said. "If you'll take care of the old gentleman, when he talks, I'll manage him when he starts throwing pans about."

"How far is it to her ranch?" Phyllis inquired.

"Not more than five miles from the end of the pasture," Janet told her.

Phyllis looked down despairingly at the habit in her lap.

"I won't be able to walk for a week," she said mournfully, and Rooster will probably throw me as soon as we are outside of the house, but we'll go just the same."

"Most men haven't very much sense," she said later. "Tommy seems to have less than his share."

Before the bugle sounded, she had explained to Janet, and they had settled on a campaign. During luncheon Phyllis opened it.

"Beggar"—she had long since discarded the formal Mr. Beggs—"in all the western stories I've ever read, they always have barbecues.

Why can't we have one?"

Beggar laughed, and looked up and down the table.

"Boys," he said, "do you hear that? Miss Phyllis wants a barbecue."

"It can't be done," Circus Bailey announced. "But we might stage a picnic."

"Loophole is giving a huge one on the fourth of July," Tom interrupted. "Some of the men were talking to me about it this morning. I told them we'd all be there sure."

"But, Tommy, that's so far away," Janet protested.

"Can't we have one, just for ourselves sometimes soon? Up in that nice place you were telling me about Beggar, where the rock is split in the mesa."

The boys laughed, but Janet and Auntie Mogs looked inquiringly at Phyllis.

"Mesa means table land," she explained, "and

it sounds so much more important and romantic."

"What cracked the mesa?" Tom teased.

But Phyllis refused to be flustered in spite of the many laughing eyes turned upon her.

"Oh, it's a place in the rocks, like a gorge or something, and it's quite wide, and a ducky place to have a picnic."

"You win," Beggar said gravely. "The Twin Stars go on a picnic to the Ducky Gorge, as soon as it can possibly be arranged."

"Oh, Beggar, that's awfully nice of you," Phyllis exclaimed gratefully, "and you'll let me drive the car with all the provisions for it, won't you? Now don't you think we could have it on Sunday?"

Beggar looked around the table. Most of the outfit went into Loophole on Sunday, and he expected to see consternation writ large on their faces. Instead, he was met with broad grins.

Such was the change wrought at the Twin Stars by the advent of twins.

Luncheon over, the twins hurried to their rooms and put on their riding habits.

"Tommy will never let you go all that way alone with me," Janet protested, as they finished dressing.

"Tommy isn't going to see me go," Phyllis replied. "He is riding into Loophole on some business of irrigation, and he won't be back until dinner time. English Kedgeree is going with him."

As if to confirm her words, they heard the horses galloping past the house. Phyllis threw a kiss after the sound.

"Tommy," she said solemnly, "you'll never know how much I love you, to be willing to ride five miles for your sake."

"Ten," Janet corrected her unfeelingly, and Phyllis groaned.

"Go and see if you can find someone to harness the horses, I'll go and tell Auntie Mogs."

Janet slipped out to the corral, and found Sulky Prescott just as he was about to leave.

"Oh Sulky—I beg your pardon, I mean Mr. Prescott," she stammered.

Sulky smiled down at her. "No need to be sorry, little lady," he said. "Sulky is a pretty bad nickname, but I'd a heap rather have you call me that than Mr. Prescott."

"Oh, thank you ever so much," Janet said shyly. "Tell me what your real name is."

"Peter," Sulky answered shortly.

"Oh that's the name of my very best friend, Peter Gibbs."

"You don't mean Peter Gibbs, the engineer's son," Sulky demanded.

"Indeed, I do. He's the very best friend I have in all the world," Janet told him. "Do you know him?"

Sulky laughed a harsh cracking sound, as if laughter was difficult for him.

"Yes, I knew him before he died. One of the whitest men that ever lived. Peter was just a young one of ten then, and we were great friends. He used to say he was named for me, and he always called me Uncle Pete."

Janet swung herself up on one of the feed boxes, and clasped her hands around her knees. She had only known Peter Gibbs for a year, but she had found him when she most needed a friend. This was before the days when she knew she had a twin, and the strongest friendship existed between the two. She told Sulky about their curious meeting, and described some of the good times they had together. She would have talked until sundown, if Phyllis had not appeared at the doorway. When she heard the news, she had to tell Sulky how much she liked Peter, too, so that it was well after three o'clock before the horses were saddled, and they were on their way to call on Daisy Weaver.

CHAPTER IX

A FORMAL CALL

"STICK your knees into the horse and hold on that way," Janet admonished as she trotted easily besides Phyllis, who was having a terrible time not to slip off her saddle, "and don't clutch that pummel so."

"That's all very well for you, Janet Page," Phyllis replied miserably. "You're not frightened to death every minute, and I am. Every time Rooster picks up his ears, I think he's making up his mind to throw me, so, of course, I hang on to the saddle."

"Well, you mustn't do it," Janet insisted, "you'll never learn to ride if you do."

"Don't want to learn to ride," Phyllis replied almost in tears. "Why, oh why, didn't we come in an automobile."

Janet did not reply at once. She looked ahead towards a clump of trees in the distance. They were few and straggling, but they helped to shelter the miserable little hut with a lean-to kitchen which jutted out at an ugly angle to one side.

"Cheer up," she said, "we're nearly there."

Phyllis looked, too. "What a miserable old house!" she exclaimed. "Think how horrible it must be to live there." Jan, we simply must make friends with that girl, and do something for her."

Janet nodded seriously. "She'd like to be friends well enough, but will her father let her, for, in spite of all his meanness, she seems to love him."

"Afraid of him is more like it," Phyllis insisted.

"But she sent Tommy away because he criticized him."

"I don't believe it. Her father was probably standing in the house with a shotgun leveled at Tommy's head, and he probably made her say what she did."

"Oh, Phyl!" Janet laughed, "you talk like a movie."

"Just the same," Phyllis insisted stubbornly, "you'll find I'm not far from right."

"Whoever put such an idea into your head?"

"Well, nobody would send Tommy away unless they had to."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Of course, I am, there you are."

"No, *here* we are," Janet laughed, "and here comes papa to meet us."

An old man with a thin wizened face, set-in dirty grey whiskers and tangled hair, had come forward to meet them. He had been cleaning his gun, and he carried it now menacingly, as he shambled towards the road.

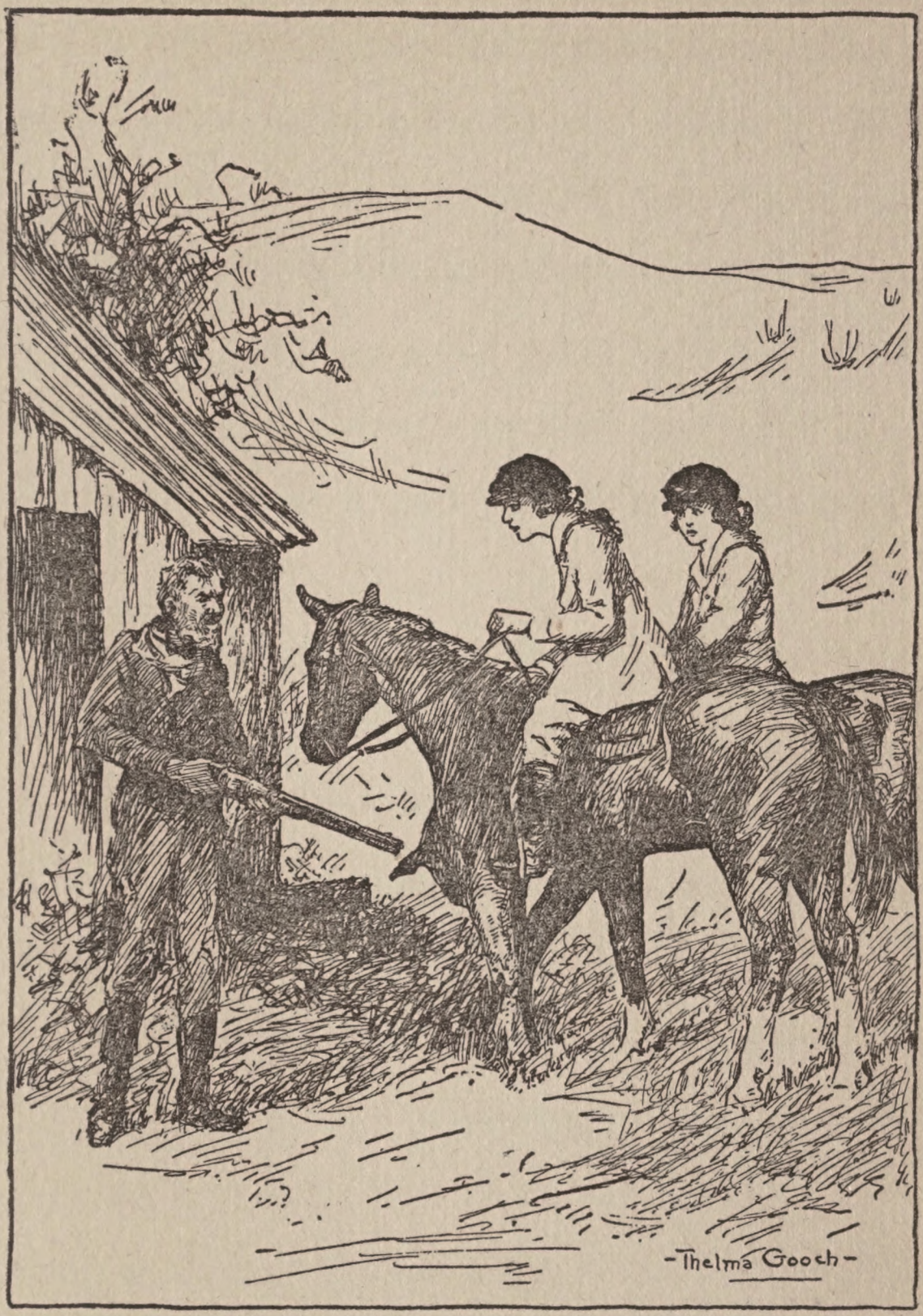
"What d'you want?" he snarled. "If you're Tom Page's sisters, you can get off my property, or I'll shoot you."

"What a nice old gentleman," Janet whispered under her breath, and Phyllis laughed.

They did not stop their horses, but rode right up to where Mr. Weaver was standing, and Phyllis leaned down in her saddle, and held out her small gauntleted hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Weaver?" she said in her sweetest manner, completely ignoring his greeting. "We thought we would call on you. What a nice little house you have!"

Now, the shack had always been Mr. Weaver's sore point. Everybody he met told



"What d'you want?" he snarled. "If you're Tom Page's sisters you can get off my property."

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him it was a disgrace, and that for Daisy's sake he ought to build a better one, when he had lived in it all his life, and it was one of the few things for which he had any real affection.

Phyllis with her usual good luck happened to be the first person that had ever said anything nice about it, and Mr. Weaver looked at her in surprise.

"What are you saying that for, if you don't mean it," he whined.

"But I do mean it." Phyllis was quick to follow up her advantage. "I think it's an awfully nice place, and it looks so comfy."

Mr. Weaver favored her with a long stare.

"Humph," he said grudgingly, "you got more sense than your brother then." He turned suddenly to Janet. At the sight of the remarkable likeness, a baffled expression came over his face, and the lids fluttered down over the pale bloodshot blue eyes.

"Sun's plying tricks on me," he grumbled.

Phyllis was off her horse in a second, and standing close beside him.

"No it's not," she assured him. "We're twins. Open your eyes, and you will see that one is on a horse, and the other one is on the ground. I bet you can't tell us apart," she added chuckling softly.

Mr. Weaver opened his eyes, and glared at them both.

"Don't want to know either of you. Get out of here. You're Tom Page's sisters, and that's enough for me. Tom Page is no good, I tell you," he growled with a return to his previous manner.

Phyllis watched him. He reminded her of a naughty sullen child, who had been kept up past his bed time.

But Janet had no such feeling of tolerance.

She jumped off her horse, and faced him, her cheeks scarlet.

"Don't you talk that way about my brother, you horrible old man." She stamped her foot as she spoke. "He is good, and you know it."

Mr. Weaver had never in all his long life been stamped at by a woman—in fact, he had always managed to keep them in a state of subjection. Even Daisy cringed when he raised his voice.

"I tell you he is no good," he stormed.

"He *is* good," Janet insisted, without a trace of anger in her voice, but with a calm determination that penetrated even Mr. Weaver's fuddled brain.

"Where's Daisy?" Phyllis came to the rescue. "We really came over to call on her, you know. Can't we go in your nice little house and rest a while—I'm just dead from this long ride."

Without waiting for him to give them his

permission, she walked up the two steps that lead to the door, and pushed it open gently. She saw a single room, with a big stove in one corner. There were chairs that had once been good, but were now dilapidated, the stuffing coming out of them for the most part, or a leg or an arm off. There were no carpets on the floor, and no curtains at the windows, but the place was immaculately clean. As Phyllis entered, she saw Daisy standing in the center of the room, her hands pressed to her temples, and her eyes closed tight. She was wearing a dark-blue print dress, that set off the beauty of her golden hair.

"Hello, Miss Weaver," Phyllis began. "Janet and I have come over to call on you."

Daisy's hands dropped to her side, and her eyes opened with a flash.

"Oh," she said, blushing painfully, "you shouldn't have come."

"Oh, but we wanted to," Phyllis assured her,

"and the ride wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be. I wouldn't have minded it at all, if my horse hadn't bumped so."

Daisy smiled a shy little smile, and just then Janet came in, followed by Mr. Weaver.

Janet said how do you do to Daisy, and Phyllis called gayly to Mr. Weaver.

"Come along, and see if you can tell us apart."

"Shucks," Mr. Weaver replied inelegantly.

"Oh, you're afraid you can't. I knew you couldn't."

"Can, too." Mr. Weaver was more than ever like the bad child.

"Well, then try, I dare you to."

"Won't do it."

"Scared."

"No such thing." Mr. Weaver's pride was touched, and he scowled furiously. But Phyllis only laughed at him, while Daisy trembled beside Janet.

"Then do it," she challenged.

"I'll do it to keep you still." Mr. Weaver gave in at last. He was secretly pleased, and a horrible grin played around the corners of his toothless mouth.

Phyllis made him turn around, while she and Janet changed places. When he faced them again, he stared blinking. The smile on Phyllis' lips, and the flash of anger that was still in Janet's eyes, would have been plain signals to the most unobserving, and Mr. Weaver was a very sly old fox.

"You're the nice one," he said, pointing to Phyllis, "and you're the sassy one," he scowled at Janet.

"Good for you," Phyllis exclaimed. "How awfully clever of you. Hardly any of our friends can tell us apart, and to think you did the very first time you met us!"

"Shucks," Mr. Weaver said again, but this

time there was a note of satisfaction in his quarrelsome voice.

"Why, it's five o'clock already!" Janet exclaimed, looking at the big alarm clock over the fireplace. "We must go back, Phyl." She turned to Daisy—

"Can't you ride as far as the mail boxes with us?" she asked. "It's about time for the afternoon mail."

Daisy looked at her father with so much fear in the expression of her eyes, that Phyllis wanted to shake her. She had never been afraid of anyone in all her life. Janet, on the other hand, recognized something of what she was going through, for she had been afraid of her own grandmother, to a far lesser degree, of course, but still she understood.

Mr. Weaver grunted approval, but only because he was really expecting some mail, and the three set off at a leisurely place, Phyllis riding in the middle.

Daisy did not have much to say, but she succeeded in making the twins like her, and when she rode back to her father, in the lonely shack, she had a warm glow around her heart, and a feeling that things in the future would not be so drearily lonely as they had been in the past.

Such had the confidence of those who were "taken up" by the twins. Sulky Prescott had something of the same feeling as he rubbed down his horse that night.

CHAPTER X

MORE PLANS

"THEN we're really going to have a picnic on Sunday?" Janet asked the next morning at breakfast, and the boys all solemnly nodded.

"Oh, by the way, Tommy, do you care if we ask Daisy Weaver to go along, too," Phyllis asked, as though inviting Daisy Weaver to join them at their picnic was the most natural thing in the world.

Tom looked at her sharply, and most of the boys bent their heads down over their plates.

"You don't know Daisy Weaver," Tom said almost gruffly.

"Oh, but indeed we do!" Phyllis assured him.

"When did you meet her?" Tom demanded.

"We were out riding yesterday afternoon, and we stopped in at their house. Mr. Weaver was there, and we had quite a lot of fun."

Every head was raised, and one concentrated incredulous glance was cast at Phyllis.

"You stopped at the Weaver's?" Tom inquired, trying to keep his voice calm.

Phyllis nodded.

"Do you know that old man Weaver threatened to kill me on sight, if I stepped on his property again?"

This time, Janet laughed.

"Well, he threatened to kill us, too, before Phyl got off her horse and explained that we'd only come for a social call."

"Oh, I say—!" English Kedgeree's face

showed consternation. "He might have done it, you know."

"Oh, he looked quite equal to it," Janet nodded. "He had his gun and everything, but Phyllis teased him a little, and when we left he was quite cheerful."

"He's rather a nice old man," said Phyllis taking up the story at this point. "He told us apart, which is really clever for a man as blind as he is. Daisy went as far back as the mail boxes with us. She's a darling, and Jan and I want to see if we can't make her feel a little less lonely while we're here."

"Quite right, too, my dears," Auntie Mogs spoke up. Poor child, she must have a very unhappy life. Did she never go to school, Tommy?" she asked, turning to her nephew.

"Indeed, she did," Tom spoke with more heat than the occasion required. "Daisy Weaver has one of the finest minds I've ever known. She

went through our school at Loophole, and she was just going to boarding school, when Mrs. Weaver died. After that the old man began to have his fits of rage, and, of course, Daisy has never gotten away from him since."

"Oh, of course, he's as mad as a hatter," Phyllis remarked. "I wanted to spank him and put him to bed. Daisy seems quite afraid of him."

"It's different when you live with a person like that, and have lived with him all your life," Janet spoke from the depth of her experience.

"But hasn't Daisy any aunts or cousins?" Auntie Mogs persisted.

"Oh, yes," Tom answered wearily, but it's the usual story. The mother married against her parent's wishes, and they wouldn't have anything to do with her. I wrote to an aunt of hers, her mother's sister, somebody named Weatherby, after Mrs. Weaver died. She never answered my letter."

"She's sure to be horrid, if her name is Weatherby," Phyllis announced. and Janet and Auntie Mogs laughed heartily.

"What's the joke?" Jim Martin asked in his gentle voice.

But the twins shook their heads.

"Don't you dare," said Phyllis.

"I won't if you won't," said Janet.

Daisy for the time being was forgotten, and the men combined their efforts to making the twins tell them the joke, but they failed, and Auntie Mogs, when appealed to, only shook her head and smiled.

The real excitement of the day began, when Tommy made the remark at luncheon that they needed some extra pack burros. He spoke to Sulky, and Janet picked up her ears, when she heard English Kedgeree say—

"I haven't anything to do this afternoon, Sulky. I'll help you weed out a few. There's

a flock of them up in the hills, back of the south pasture."

Janet waited until Sulky was alone in the corral.

"What did English mean by saying he'd help you get some burros, Uncle Pete?" she asked, adopting quite naturally Peter's nickname for Sulky.

"Why, they run wild up in the hills," Sulky explained. "They're the hardest things in the world to catch, for they are fleeter on their feet than deers, but when you catch them there just isn't any animal more slow and worthless. They spend the rest of their life in getting even with you, and I'll tell you, they sure do make you wish you'd let them alone."

"It must be lots of fun chasing them," Janet said wistfully. "I wish I could go with you," she added.

"Don't see why you can't," Sulky answered promptly. "We'll talk to Tom about it."

Tom was passing the corral on horseback, and Sulky hailed him.

"Any objections to my taking the youngster along when we go after the burros?" he called.

"Not if she won't bother you," Tom answered. "Just be sure not to lose her." Sulky nodded, and without more adieu, went to the corral to catch Booster.

"Better tell Auntie Mogs, Jan," Tom called back over his shoulder as he went away.

Janet went into the house, but she could not find Phyllis nor Auntie Mogs anywhere. She heard the chug-chug of the automobile, and ran to the dining room window just in time to see Phyllis at the wheel with Beggar beside her, and Auntie Mogs in the back seat. She found a note in her room, scrawled in Phyllis' handwriting. She read:

Dear Jan:

Thought I'd clear the coast, for I

could see burros in your eye at lunch. Don't get killed, and bring me back one of the smallest for a pet.

I'm going to drive the car at forty today, while Beggar shows Auntie Mogs the landscape.

Good Luck,

PHYL.

Janet read the note and laughed softly to herself.

"Good old Phyl," she said. "I might have known she would have guessed what was going on inside of my head. She always does. Thank goodness I've got a twin." This last was almost a prayer of thanksgiving. Janet and Phyllis caught themselves saying it many times during the day.

CHAPTER XI

TRAILING THE BURROS

SHE snatched up her hat, and hurried back to the corral, to find Sulky and English Kedgeree, waiting for her. She mounted Booster, and they trotted off towards the hills.

They were riding south, and after a little while, where the cultivation of the ranch stopped, giant cactus blocked their way, and they rode up steep little paths, single file, into the foothill.

They reached a tiny plateau, and English stopped.

"It was about this spot that I saw them," he said.

"That doesn't mean much," Sulky laughed. "That was yesterday, they may be fifty miles away today.

As the discussed the advisability of moving on, Janet looked around her. From a clump of greasewood, almost directly under the horse's feet, and a little down the slope, she saw a pair of long ears and two bright eyes that looked at her curiously.

"Isn't that one of them?" she whispered excitedly.

Sulky and English turned just as the little burro kicked up his heels and ran down the slope.

"Reckon the rest are not far away," Sulky said. "Let's have a look."

They rode after the retreating burro at top speed, and it was not long before they came to the herd.

"Why, the darlings!" Janet exclaimed, as she saw the funny little animals frisking about.

Sulky lead Booster to a level spot and left Janet alone to watch as he and English swooped down on the burros, twirling their lassoes above their heads.

For a time the fun was fast and furious. The lively little steeds would always escape by a hair's breadth and then the chase would start all over. They moved on, first down the slope and then up, Janet following, until they were well into the hills. Janet felt that she was indeed on the high places of the world, or in a different planet, for the broad plateau of the table land seemed a place apart, and she had the curious feeling that she was suspended in air.

At the most exciting part of the race, she was watching Sulky and English from a considerable height. She saw Sulky suddenly wheel his horse about and ride over to English. Janet

thought it was strange that he did not shout what he wanted to say, and she was more than surprised when, after a minute's conversation, both men wheeled their horses and cantered back to her.

"Home we go, little lady," Sulky said hurriedly.

Janet stared at him in amazement.

"But what about the burros?" she inquired.

"Too beastly fast," English tried to explain, "we'll have to come another day."

Janet did not ask any more questions, she had too much sense for that. She thought hard all the way home, but when they reached the Twin Stars she was no nearer to the explanation than when she started out.

There was a lot of good-natured teasing when they returned without the burros, but Sulky took Tom into the office, and when they returned Tom looked very grave.

Phyllis's return created a diversion. She was driving the car, and by the triumphant tilt of her head Janet knew that she had driven the car at the coveted forty miles an hour.

"It's been a perfectly thrilling day!" she exclaimed. "Tommy, dear, I am so glad you had to send Beggar to town, I drove the car both ways, and if Auntie Mogs were not here I would tell you how fast we went.

Auntie Mogs laughed. "Dear child, don't stop on my account," she said. "If they ask me about it, I shall most certainly tell them we went one hundred and fifty miles all the time."

"Well, it wasn't quite as bad as all that," Phyllis smiled contentedly, "but we did hit forty. Oh, I forgot to tell you," she added excitedly, "the Mexicans are out, bands of them, and they are burning up peoples' barns and things all over the place. Isn't that thrilling!"

Janet listened in silence, but just before dinner she went to Sulky.

"Uncle Pete, why didn't we wait and catch the burros this afternoon?" she demanded.

"Because, little lady, I saw a bunch of Mexicans over across on the next hill and I didn't think the neighborhood was healthy," he told her, and went back to the harness he was cleaning.

"I thought it was something like that. Now I suppose we can't have the picnic?"

"Reckon not," Sulky replied. "Tom will want you and your sister to stay pretty close to home."

Janet nodded and went thoughtfully into the house, here eyes shining.

CHAPTER XII

A HINT OF DANGER

AFTER dinner that night Tom called Janet and Phyllis into his office. He looked worried, and he spoke abruptly.

"Look here, youngsters; I want you to promise me something," he began.

"Why Tommy, what is the matter?" Phyllis inquired.

Janet nodded her head in understanding; she knew what was coming.

"The Mexicans are out, and though that does not mean there is any danger, still I want you both to stay very close to the house."

"How simply thrilling!" Phyllis exclaimed.

"No more nice long horseback rides," Janet mourned.

Tom, who up until now had been watching them both with a rather anxious expression, swung round to his desk and laughed.

"I might have known you wouldn't be scared," he said with a note of pride in his voice. "Well, chase along but don't tell Auntie Mogs anything about all this. It would frighten her and there is really no need to worry as long as you stay near the house.

"Scared!" Phyllis laughed at the idea. "I'd as soon be scared of a few Mexicans with Beggar here to protect us from them as I would of a sky terrier."

"Thanks," Tom replied dryly. "Who will you choose as your special bodyguard, Jan," he asked, laughing.

"Oh, I'd feel safe with any of them," Janet replied.

"That's better," Tom nodded.

"But of course," she continued without paying any attention to his interruption, "I'd like to have Sulky or English Kedgeree."

When Tom stopped laughing he managed to say:

"Well, I congratulate you on picking my very best men, at any rate."

"Cheer up about the picnic," he added as they were leaving. "We'll have that any way, even if we have to eat in the corral."

And a picnic they had indeed! Phyllis persuaded Screw Williams to take a note over to Daisy Weaver, telling her that they were still planning on her coming if she were not afraid of the Mexicans.

An answer came back saying that she was not a bit afraid and that as her father expected to spend the day in Loophole she was sure she could get away.

"I'll bet that he is going away just so that Daisy can come," Janet announced after they had all read the note.

They were in Auntie Mogs room, the twins were sitting on the window seat and Auntie Mogs sewed in the wicker rocker.

"He'd never dare face you, Phyl., if he didn't let her come," she added.

"Nonsense," Phyllis protested, "*I'm* not the one he'll be likely to be afraid of. You were the one that gave him a dressing down."

"I do hope she will be all right getting here," Auntie Mogs said uneasily. "If there are Mexicans about I can't believe it is safe for a girl to ride about alone."

"Why, Auntie Mogs, who ever put such an idea into your head?" Phyllis demanded.

"Tommy says we are perfectly safe," Janet assured her.

"Still, I don't like it," Auntie Mogs folded up

her sewing and by the expression of her delicate little mouth, the twins knew that she had made up her mind to something.

Just what that something was they found out at dinner. Auntie Mogs had been very quiet during the meal, but when the dessert came in she turned to Tom.

"Did you know, dear, that Daisy Weaver had written to the girls that she was coming to the picnic tomorrow?" she inquired.

"No; is she?" Tom tried to keep some of the eagerness out of his voice as he answered, but he failed completely.

"Yes, she is coming, and I can't help being a little worried about her. It's all very well to say that Mexicans are harmless, but I don't think that girl ought to come all the way over here by herself. Can't you go and meet her?"

Janet tried to kick Phyllis under the table but she kicked English by mistake. He flashed her

a smile of perfect understanding that might almost have been called a wink.

"I'll see that she gets here and returns safely," Tom promised, and then changed the subject so abruptly that everybody wanted to laugh.

On the afternoon of the picnic—it was to be a supper instead of a luncheon—all the men disappeared. Some of them carried the baskets of food to the nook where they were going to have the picnic and some of them had mysterious but pressing business away from the ranch.

Tom came into the living room about three o'clock. It was deserted, but he heard laughter in the dining room, where the twins were finishing the sandwiches.

"Where are all the boys?" he inquired.

"Don't know, Tommy," Phyllis replied.

"Sulky was here not so very long ago," Janet told him.

"Where is he now?"

"Haven't the least idea."

"Tom, isn't it time that someone went to meet Daisy Weaver?" Auntie Mogs entered the room just as Tom was about to leave.

"Guess it is," Tom replied. "I can't find any of the boys, so I will have to go myself. Shall I bring her here or shall we meet you at the picnic grounds?"

"Oh, the picnic grounds!" Janet and Phyllis exclaimed together. "We are starting right away."

After Tom had left them, the two conspirators looked at each other and smiled mysteriously.

"It's a lot longer to the picnic place," Phyllis said softly.

"Hum; I shouldn't wonder if they rode the whole way without a word," Janet remarked thoughtfully. "We'd better get ready to start."

"Where did Sulky say you could find him when you wanted the horses saddled?"

"In the tool house. He had a lot of things he wanted to mend."

"Dear me, if Tom had known he was so near he would have asked him to go for Daisy." Auntie Mogs did not know that she was saying anything amusing and she was very much surprised when the twins burst into a sudden gale of laughter. In an instant she understood, and her soft laugh joined their hearty ones.

At the sheltered nook that nestled triangle shape into the hill on which the twins had had their first view of the ranch house the boys waited. They had built a fire and spread rugs on the ground. The hampers were open and everything was in readiness.

As they rode softly up the twins heard the men singing.

"And that makes it altogether perfect," Phyllis exclaimed.

They reined in their horses and listened until

the last notes of the song floated away on the golden air. Then they rode on at a gallop—that is, all except Auntie Mogs, who was comfortably seated on an old side saddle, borrowed especially for her coming, and mounted on the oldest horse in Tom's possession.

"Oh, that was beautiful!" Phyllis exclaimed. "Please sing some more."

But the men all looked at each other in embarrassment and Phyllis, seeing it, did not tease for any more just then.

They had quite a long wait before Daisy and Tom arrived.

Daisy looked prettier than ever and, as Janet said afterwards, "Tom looked crosser." They rode up at a brisk canter and Daisy's eyes danced as English Kedgeree helped her down from her horse.

"I say, it *is* nice to see you again," he began; "we've missed you."

"Should say we have," Beggar added.

"You hadn't ought to neglect us this way," Jim Martin's soft drawl finished.

But Daisy held out both hands to the twins.

"It was awfully good of you to want me," she said simply.

Phyllis introduced her to Auntie Mogs and in the smile of understanding and the eager hand-clasp that passed between them, a friendship started that grew strong with the years to come.

It was not long before the supper was spread before them.

The twins insisted that Daisy must sit between them, but Auntie Mogs ruled otherwise and seated her finally at Tom's right. Janet found her place between Sulky and English, and Phyllis, her back comfortably settled against the warm rock, divided her attentions between Beggar and Circus Bailey.

It was such a lively feast that it lasted for a long while. After it was over they all played games—children's games with forfeits and all the things that make people laugh.

After a very strenuous game of tag they settled down around the fire and sang. Old songs for the most part that Tom and English could sing second to.

Then came the war songs. All the boys had been over except Tom and Sulky, and in the intervals they told stories of the trenches that left queer lumps in their hearers' throats.

It was after they had finished "The Long, Long Trail" for perhaps the sixth time that Janet jumped up.

"Look!" she exclaimed, "the sky is all red."

The men jumped to their feet.

"Fire!" Begger whistled softly.

"Our barns," Tom added.

"Mexs." said English Kedgeree disgustedly.

CHAPTER XIII

A BRUSH WITH THE MEXICANS

FOR a minute no one said a word; then, as if by common consent, the men moved a little away and began to talk in low voices.

"Circus, you get the horses," they heard Tom say, and Circus hurried off.

Finally, Tom came over to Auntie Mogs.

"Everything is all right, dear. You are none of you to worry. Some of us are going ahead, but we will keep in touch with you and when it is safe for you to return we will send back for you," he said.

Auntie Mogs nodded. "Very well, my dear, we will all do just as you say," she replied calmly, though her hand trembled as she rested it on Tom's arm.

A minute later the men rode off, only Sulky and Jim Martin staying behind. They did not immediately join the women, but stood talking earnestly.

"Not scared, are you, little lady?" Sulky inquired, as he came over to Janet at last.

"Of course not," Janet replied.

"You see, we don't know for sure that the Mexs. had anything to do with the blaze," he went on.

"Maybe José dropped a match into the gasoline tank," Jim suggested. "It sounds just like him."

The laugh that followed was a dismal failure.

"Anyway, we'll soon find out," Sulky tried to be comforting.

"How about your gun?" Jim asked in an undertone, but Janet and Phyllis both heard it.

"Hold my hand tight, Jan.," Phyllis whispered.

"Frightened?" Janet demanded.

"No-oo, but I always feel protected when you hold on to me."

Janet gave her hand a tight squeeze. It was in times like these that the twins found how much they needed each other. Phyllis always depended on Janet and her confidence gave Janet any amount of courage.

"My gun's O. K., and I have plenty to feed it." Sulky was speaking.

"Same here. I guess Screw won't josh me any more about going around with an ammunition factory." Jim laughed a low, contented laugh.

They took up positions on both sides of the nook and kept a constant watch into the night.

Auntie Mogs drew Daisy beside her and the girl put her head on her shoulder.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear." Auntie Mogs was trying hard to be very matter-of-fact. "I really think Jim's theory is right. I feel sure the Mexicans had nothing to do with it."

Daisy sighed. She was not thinking of the Mexicans.

"If only I knew he was safe," she whispered.

Auntie Mogs did not make the mistake of thinking the "he" was Daisy's father. She knew it was Tom, and her arm tightened around the slender shoulder.

They talked in whispers, for Sulky had cautioned them to be quiet and the time dragged by.

Twice Janet saw Jim return to the dying fire and look at his watch. At last he crossed over to Sulky and they talked for a little while, evidently arguing out some point.

At last the most hideous sound in the world

came to them—gun fire. They heard it first faintly, but it grew louder with every shot.

"Something's up, anyway," Jim said with a sigh of relief.

Sulky stood up to listen.

"West pasture, I'd say," he said quietly. "Won't be long now," he added confidently.

But it seemed an age more of waiting before a faint "Hello" reached them, followed by the welcome sight of English Kedgeree, his horse covered with foam, his hat gone, but, as always, in good spirits.

"Better come along now," he said cheerfully.

"Is everything all right?" Auntie Mogs asked the question that was in every mouth.

"Oh yes, absolutely," English assured her. "We had a bit of a shindy and some of the boys got scratched, but we accounted for all the Mexs., so *that's* all right."

It was perhaps just as well that Auntie Mogs

did not understand what "accounted for" meant.

Jim's question, "Didn't you leave one for me?" was lost on her as well.

The twins and Daisy, however, understood.

"Let's hurry," Janet exclaimed. "Perhaps we could help."

They were soon on their horses and, with the three men riding close around them, they rode as fast as Auntie Mogs' horse could carry them, for being the slowest, he had to set the pace.

Sulky and Jim asked questions as they rode.

"What's burnt?" from Sulky.

"Only the tool house. We caught them getting ready to fire the barn and Circus found some gasoline up by the house," English explained.

"How about José?" Jim inquired.

"Roped to a chair in the kitchen. He's still too frightened to talk, but we gather that his countrymen planned to burn him along with the

house. Cheerful beggars they are, aren't they?" English rolled and lit a cigarette with one hand. Phyllis, who had always watched him, fascinated, when he did it, was overcome with admiration at his steady hand tonight.

They found the ranch house ablaze with light and the men in a far worse condition than English had lead them to suppose. Tom's shirt was torn at the shoulder and the sleeve of it was covered with blood.

Beggar and Circus were lying on the floor of the living room. A bad gash ran down the whole length of Beggar's cheek and Circus was doubled up with pain, for a bullet had lodged in his hip.

Screw Williams was the proud possessor of a black eye.

"The man that gave me this must have lived a considerable time this side of the border," he explained with a pleased grin. "He sure could punch."

The girls, with Auntie Mogs to direct them, set about bandaging and dressing the wounds. Phyllis bathed Beggar's cheek and swathed his head in soft linen. Daisy was doing what she could for Tom. Janet had just finished giving Circus a drink when she happened to look out on the veranda just in time to see English fall forward on his face.

She rushed to him and, with Screw's assistance, dragged him into the house. He had been badly shot through the arm but he had ridden out to bring them home, insisting that he was not hurt. He had answered their questions on the ride home and none of them had guessed that he was hurt. Now he was in a dead faint from loss of blood.

"Golly!" Screw Williams was the first to speak, although Janet was doing all in her power to bring him around.

"Golly!" he repeated. "I take off my hat, old

pal, and I'll never slam the British again even to get you mad." It was the sincerest tribute that Screw could have paid.

"Tommy, we must get a doctor," Auntie Mogs almost cried. "Can't one of the men go into town?"

Tom smiled at her weakly. "I don't see how, dear," he said. "We must have men to guard the place. Some of the Mexicans may have gotten away. Sulky and Jim are on watch now."

"And I'm going to join them." Screw got up shakily.

"But you can't," Phyllis protested. "Your head must be splitting."

For answer, Screw looked at the still unconscious English and walked painfully out of the room.

A minute later Phyllis followed him. No one missed her, for Daisy and Janet were busy working over English and Auntie Mogs had Circus Bailey's head in her lap.

Suddenly Beggar sat up and at the same time the others heard an automobile.

"Where is she?" he demanded. Stop her, somebody!" The roads aren't safe at night." He tried to get up, but he fell back exhausted.

"Phyllis!" Auntie Mogs cried.

Janet looked out of the open door and strained her ears for the last sound of the car.

"Don't worry, Auntie Mogs," she said softly. "Phyl. will make it all right."

"I could follow her on my horse," Daisy suggested. "She wouldn't go very fast at night."

"You could do no such thing," Tom replied sternly, and Daisy subsided. Janet leaned over and squeezed her hand.

"You're a peach to offer," she whispered.

It was a weary wait, those two hours before Phyllis' return, but to Phyllis they were even longer. Doubled over the wheel she forced the car ahead at a terrific speed. It was one of the

times when she had changed places with her twin and she kept saying over and over to herself: "I am Janet; I am Janet."

She reached Loophole at last and honked her horn up and down the main street. All the men came out of their houses and shops, for it was still early, and in a very few minutes the car was filled and the doctor took the wheel.

Phyllis answered questions all the way home. Every now and then the doctor would turn to look at her.

"Didn't know they made 'em like that in the East," was his only comment.

CHAPTER XIV

A TELEPHONE MESSAGE

"NO, Tom, I won't promise you any such thing," Janet heard Daisy's voice as she came under the living room window. She ducked, but not before she heard Tom answer.

"Very well." His voice sounded stern, as it always did when he talked to Daisy. "But it is not safe for you to be out alone and it makes it harder for those of us who are responsible for your safety."

"You are not responsible for my—." Janet heard no more.

She went off in search of English, who was wandering disconsolate around the corral. It was four days after the raid and he was not sufficiently recovered to ride. The enforced rest was making him very nervous.

"Hello, little nurse!" he greeted as he saw Janet.

"You are to come straight out of the sun," Janet told him without preamble.

"Oh, come now; I'm only taking a bit of a stroll. Can't possibly hurt me, you know," he protested.

"Oh, but it can. It can bring back that awful fever," Janet insisted; so in you come. I'll fix a nice chair for you on the north side of the veranda and I'll make you something cool to drink—and that's more than you deserve, for you really knew better than to come out here in this broiling sun," she added.

English laughed and followed her to the

house. As they passed the living room they heard Tom and Daisy, their voices raised in anger.

Janet looked at English. "Aren't they silly?" she asked lightly.

"Well, all things considered, I think they are, rather," English replied gravely.

"Suppose I sit here?" he suggested timidly, as they reached the veranda. He indicated the steps.

Janet's only answer was a look of scorn. She went into the house and came back dragging a big rocker. Then she found sofa cushions and a light slumber robe. She prodded and patted them until they were to her liking and then she looked once more at English.

Without a word he got up and meekly settled himself amongst the pillows. Janet slipped one under his sore arm, threw the robe over him and went back into the house.

"José, I want some lemons and some oranges and some of those maraschino cherries that you keep hidden in that little bottle," she announced, with her sweetest smile, from the door of the kitchen.

José, now completely recovered from his terrible fright, spent most of his time in swearing vengeance on his brother Mexicans and this kept him in a very bad humor most of the time.

"No can have," he replied stoutly. "Me, I save those cherries for a swell dessert. The oranges and the lemons I give you."

"But they won't do me a bit of good without the cherries," Janet protested.

"No can have," José reiterated.

"I wouldn't ask for them myself," Janet went on, "but I do think that any one as brave and as splendid as English Kedgeree should have all the cherries he wants. Don't you?"

The name acted like a charm. José's scowl disappeared and a smile spread over his face.

"For him, yes. For that man I give all I got." He hastened to unearth the cherished bottle. "Did he not find me before those fiends could set fire to me and when I weep on his shoulder he say, 'There, there, old chap,' and he never tell anybody what I do."

Janet was busy squeezing the lemons, but her lack of response did not discourage José. He rambled on until Daisy, looking suspiciously red around the eyes, interrupted him.

Daisy had been at the Twin Stars ever since the raid and her father had stayed in Loophole. They had been days of happiness to the lonely girl.

"Janet, I am going back to the cabin," she announced suddenly.

"Whatever for?" Janet demanded.

"Because I must."

"Why must. Have you heard from your father?"

"No, but I expect I will today."

"Then I don't see what you are talking about. Suppose you don't hear?"

"Then I'll go back anyhow."

"How foolish. You'll do no such thing."

"See if I don't," Daisy said darkly, and left the room.

Janet returned to her fruit.

"Here you are," she said a few minutes later, as she handed the cold glass to English.

"I say, that does look good," he exclaimed. "You know you're most awfully kind to me."

"Why shouldn't I be?" Janet demanded frankly. "I like you ever so much in the first place, and in the second it's really awfully good fun taking care of you. I'm not sure that I won't be a trained nurse some day. That is, if it wasn't for Phyl. She gets very sick if she sees a little blood and, of course, I couldn't do anything without her, you know."

"Rather not," English agreed. "Besides, you wouldn't like it nearly as well as you think you would. I had a sister that tried it once."

"Oh, tell me about her," Janet insisted.

English looked out over the waste of sand and his clear blue eyes blurred.

"She died when I was just a lad," he said quietly.

Janet put her hand on his arm in instant sympathy.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Tell me, how did she die?" she added softly.

"She sucked the poison out of a boy's throat when he had diphtheria. She saved his life—a useless one, and lost her own—a beautiful one." He spoke bitterly and something in his expression made Janet ask:

"Who was the boy, English?"

He looked at her as though he had forgotten she was there.

"Who? Oh, I was," he said; and Janet realized that it was a very great sorrow and that he did not want to speak of it.

Fortunately Tom interrupted them.

"Hello, English!" he said, and he put his arm around Janet as he spoke. "I've just had a curious telephone call. Do you remember Locke?"

"The little lawyer at Loophole?" English inquired.

"Yes, that's the man."

"What about him?"

"I've just been talking to him on the phone. He was very mysterious and very anxious to know where old man Weaver was."

"You're a good one to ask that," English chuckled.

"I told him as much. Then he said he had been informed that Mr. Weaver had not been seen for two days, either at his cabin or in Loophole."

"That sounds a bit odd. Did you tell him Daisy was here?"

"Oh, he knew it; he knew everything. He asked me if she were going to stay and I said certainly, until she heard from her father."

"Righto; what next?"

"He said he had an important communication to make to her, but he would have to think out the best way of approaching it and that I would hear from him again."

Janet had been listening intently.

"I wonder what could have happened to Mr. Weaver," she said at last.

"That's just the trouble. I'm not worrying about Locke's communication, but how the deuce am I going to tell Daisy that her father has disappeared?" Tom looked the consternation he felt.

"Don't worry about it, old thing. Weaver is sure to turn up," was English's advice.

Tom went inside and Janet led the conversation back to England. English talked for over an hour of the sweet-smelling Surrey lanes, the roses in the trim gardens and his mother.

It was Phyllis who interrupted them this time. She rushed out of the house and nearly knocked Janet off the railing, where she was perched.

"Jan., for pity's sake, do come and see who is driving up to the door in a buggy!" she exclaimed.

Janet followed her to the front of the house and beheld, to her consternation, that it was no less a person than the Miss Weatherby of the hair curlers.

"What is she doing here?" she demanded.

"I don't know; but isn't it awful!" Phyllis replied. "Let's go and tell Auntie Mogs.

Janet caught a phrase of Tom's as he ran down the steps to meet the arrivals.

"How do you do, Mr. Locke," was what he said.

At the same moment, out of the corner of her eye she saw Daisy, on her horse, disappearing over a distant hill.

"This is too much for me," she said, and jumped from the porch and made for the corral.

She left Phyllis staring at the empty hall, too astonished to move.

CHAPTER XV

A THRILLING RIDE

IT was just turning dusk when Janet wheeled Booster out of the corral and headed after Daisy. It took several minutes of hard riding before the silhouette of her and her horse loomed up against the darkening sky. Janet kept it in sight and pressed Booster to even greater lengths. The little horse responded gamely and two miles from the ranch Daisy was within calling distance.

For the past half mile, Janet had been conscious that she was being followed. She turned

in the saddle and saw to her horror a long line of mounted men. They formed a half circle that looked as though it might close in on her any minute.

Daisy slowed down as she saw Janet and at the same time she, too, saw the following horsemen.

Janet never slackened her speed. She saw at a glance that she would have to take the lead, for Daisy sat her horse, white-lipped and frozen with fear.

"Follow me!" Janet shouted as she raced past.

Daisy's horse followed and the grim race began. Janet led the way to the path that she had taken with Sulky and English. The horses tripped and stumbled, but their riders pulled them up and after an endless climb they came to the first little plateau where Janet had seen the burro.

"Get off, quick!" Janet commanded, and Daisy threw herself to the ground.

With the palm of her hand, Janet slapped the horses' flanks, after she had tied their reins to the pommel of the saddle.

The startled horses gave a little whinny and trotted down the hill. All about them they could hear horsemen scrambling up the banks and now and then a muttered oath in Spanish.

"Quick! under here." Janet pulled the unresisting Daisy after her and as quietly as they could they wormed their way into the catsclaw that grew close to the ground. The sharp points of the bush tore their clothes and scratched their faces, for catsclaw is as prickly as cactus.

Daisy moaned from the terror and the pain, but Janet put her hand over her mouth.

All night long, men came and almost stepped on them, but when the first grey streaks of dawn touched the sky, they were still safe in their hiding place. They were both numb all over and their bodies ached from the catsclaw.

Daisy's shoulders shook pitifully as she sobbed hopelessly. Janet looked at her. Her blue eyes were drenched with tears and an ugly scratch had made her lip bleed.

"Ddd-ont," Daisy whispered.

"Don't what?" Janet asked abruptly. Her nerves and courage had been sorely tried during the long night, but her eyes were bright and hard. She felt disgusted with Daisy and she was so tired that she gave way to her feelings and was very irritable indeed.

"Look at me," Daisy begged.

"Don't be silly," Janet snapped.

"I ccc-an't help it."

"Well then, don't make so much noise about it or we'll have all Mexico down on us."

"Can't we ever get out of this?"

"Oh, probably in a week or so." Janet's tone was biting and she saw Daisy cower as though she had received a blow. Then a sudden

thought struck her and she remembered Tom's saying that Mr. Weaver was lost. If anything had happened to him it would mean a terrible shock for Daisy when they reached home, if they ever did.

She felt very much ashamed of herself. She put out her hand and patted Daisy's head.

"I'm sorry, dear," she whispered. "I'm a cross old thing, but I won't be any more."

A sob broke from Daisy, but Janet let it go unnoticed. There were times when she was sorely tempted to give up and go with the Mexicans; anything seemed better than this.

Daisy's sobs quieted down and after a little while she slept from sheer exhaustion. Janet closed her eyes, but she was too hungry to sleep.

In the meantime the most terrible anxiety hung over the ranch. As soon as Janet had left, Phyllis ran to the corral and found Sulky. She explained Janet's queer behavior to him, but

neither they nor any of the rest understood why she had gone until they discovered that Daisy was also missing.

"Daisy went as she threatened to," Tom said slowly, "and I suppose Janet followed her."

"Well, they'll come back in their own good time, won't they?" Miss Weatherby demanded irritably from the doorway.

When Tom had left her so abruptly at Phyllis' urgent call she had followed him into the house.

"I never saw so much commotion in all my life. Have none of you any consideration for me? I am tired and hot and I would like a cup of tea."

Auntie Mogs got up slowly and went out to the kitchen and told José to bring in tea for their guest. No one answered Miss Weatherby.

"Guess I'll dust along," Sulky said. "Coming, Tom?"

Tom nodded grimly. His shoulder still hurt him, but he did not pay any attention to it.

"I'm with you." English got up from his comfortable chair. He looked so determined that no one dared to stop him.

With a feeling of profound relief, Auntie Mogs and Phyllis heard the beat of their horses as they thundered past the house.

Auntie Mogs made an effort and turned her attention to Miss Weatherby. She was spared the trial of explaining by the timely arrival of Mr. Locke, who had been putting his horse up in the barn and knew all about it.

"It is certainly dreadful, but we must all hope for the best," he added lamely, and Phyllis was seized with an overpowering desire to slap him.

"Well, it is certainly most unfortunate," Miss Weatherby complained. "Here I come miles and miles at the dictate of my conscience, to offer my niece a sensible home and I find her racing over the country with Mexican bandits."

"As for you, Miss"—she turned suddenly to

Phyllis—"it's a wonder it isn't you and not your twin that is out there. After the way you frightened me that night in the sleeper I would expect anything."

Phyllis smiled in spite of the agony in her heart, but a second later she burst into a torrent of tears and flung herself down beside her aunt and buried her head in her lap.

The rest of the boys came in, to go right out again as soon as they heard the news. Miss Carter showed Miss Weatherby and Mr. Locke to their rooms, and returned to Phyllis and the long waiting.

Dawn came, the world turned pink and then a red sun mounted the heavens and the air seemed heavy with its rays.

José brought breakfast, of which Miss Weatherby ate heartily, Mr. Locke sparingly and Auntie Mogs and Phyllis not at all.

Back on the tiny plateau Daisy still slept and

Janet at last dozed off, to awaken to the shuddering knowledge that someone was standing over her. In a confused way she realized that whoever it was, he had not discovered them. She held her breath and prayed that Daisy would not awaken.

The man above her moved and a huge foot in very dusty riding boots came down within an inch of Daisy's head.

"Sulky!" Janet would have known that boot anywhere. She threw her arms about it and hugged it now.

"Lord of Mercy!" Sulky said reverently; "little lady." There was a world of affection in the words and unbidden the tears rushed to his steel grey eyes.

Janet wriggled painfully out of her hiding place. Sulky fired his gun three times and in an instant there were two answering reports, followed by Tom and English.

"Jan'!' Tom fairly shouted. "Oh, my little sister, what made you do it?"

"I had to take care of her," she replied, pointing to the now awakened Daisy. Then she fell forward, to be caught and held by Sulky, who carried her home on the front of his saddle.

José dashed in through the kitchen with a towel over his head, shouting:

"They are found; they are found!"

Miss Weatherby stood up and smoothed out her black satin. Mr. Locke rubbed his hands together, happily. Sulky and Tom were in the room in a minute, and Janet was held close in Phyllis' arms.

Daisy looked about her, and her eyes rested on Miss Weatherby inquiringly. That lady stepped forward, and said: "Girl, I am your aunt."

Daisy fainted dead away, and Miss Weatherby's story had perforce to wait until the next day.

CHAPTER XVI

DAISY HAS AN OFFER

AND the next day she gave it with all the pomp and dignity of which she was master. Daisy listened to her in silence.

Tom had already told her that her father had disappeared, but he had kept from her Mr. Locke's latest news, which was that Mr. Weaver's body had been found stabbed near the door of his cabin.

"What do you want me to do, Aunt Louise?" Daisy asked meekly. Miss Weatherby drew herself up.

"First of all," she said, "I want to get you away from here. This is not the sort of country for a gentlewoman to live in."

Daisy looked at her, a speechless wonder in her eyes.

"And then?" she said patiently.

"Then we will return to Boston, where I hope to place you in a select school for young women. After that you will be my companion. We will leave as soon as you are able to be moved."

Then Daisy did an astonishing thing. She said: "No thank you"; and Miss Weatherby had to fan herself vigorously before she could summon the courage to demand what she meant.

"I'm not going to leave Loophole," Daisy said stubbornly.

"And pray, what are you going to do at Loophole now that your father is dead?"

"Dead!" Daisy exclaimed. "Oh no!" She was thoroughly stunned, and Miss Weatherby saw her mistake.

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't have told you so abruptly; but you have to know sometime, and it is always best to get the telling of unpleasant things over with. You must be brave, my dear. After all, your father was not a very responsible man."

Daisy looked at her in horror for a moment. Then she buried her face in the pillow, and screamed.

"I hate you! I hate you!" she cried. "I won't go with you to Boston, and I won't leave Loophole." The pillow and her loud sobs choked further utterance. Miss Weatherby got up in indignant silence and left the room.

Auntie Mogs saw her go, and heard Daisy's sobs. She hurried to her and the girl snuggled into her arms.

"Oh, she said—" she began.

"Never mind what she said; I can guess," Auntie Mogs replied. "Try not to think about

it, and lie quiet. You mustn't get excited; and remember, my dear, this house is yours for just as long as you want to stay in it. Don't worry about where you are going until you are strong enough to think of it saneiy."

Daisy sighed a happy little sigh, and her head dropped on Auntie Mogs' shoulder.

Auntie Mogs held her until her regular breathing told that she had gone to sleep. Then she went to find Tom.

Phyllis was sitting on the edge of Janet's bed.

"Give me the hand mirror, Phyl," Janet asked.

Phyllis, who would have gladly given her the moon, had she asked for it, flew to her bag. Janet looked at herself for a long time.

"No one will mix us up now," she said ruefully. "Just look at the scratches on my face."

"Poor darling," Phyllis sympathized. "Anyhow, you're back safe and sound and that's all that matters."

Screw Williams went past the window carrying a big box on his shoulder.

"Hello, what've you got there?"

"A big box for your aunt," Screw told her.

"Oh good," Phyllis exclaimed. "I know what it is. Leave it in here."

Screw looked at the box, and stood around waiting to see if there was anything more to do.

"Go away, Screw, and don't peak. This is a surprise," Phyllis said, and she pushed the box out of sight of the window.

"What is it?" Janet asked excitedly.

"Why, it's the chintz Auntie Mogs sent for the day after Tom said we could decorate the house."

"Oh dear, I must hurry up and get well," Janet exclaimed. "Do open it and let's see what it looks like."

"Wait a minute, and I'll call Auntie Mogs."

She found her in Daisy's room, and together they tiptoed back to Janet.

Phyllis opened the package and disclosed a bolt of beautiful chintz. It was a black background, with masses of pink roses.

"That's the very kind we have at home," Phyllis exclaimed.

"Oh, I do hope the boys will like it," Janet said doubtfully.

"Oh, of course they will," Phyllis laughed. "Can't we start the curtains today?"

"Let's wait until Miss Weatherby goes," Auntie Mogs said. "She is so very difficult. I must go to her now, an see if there is anything I can do for her. Do you know, she offered to take Daisy back to Boston with her, and Daisy refused to go."

"Of course she did," Janet exclaimed, and Phyllis echoed:

"Good for Daisy!"

Auntie Mogs found Miss Weatherby packing her bag. She was very huffy indeed, and Auntie

Mogs watched her climb gingerly into Mr. Locke's buggy with a sigh of genuine relief, and drive away.

The rest of the day was a busy sewing bee. Now that Miss Weatherby had gone, Daisy began to feel better. Phyllis helped Janet into her room, and they spent the happiest of afternoons sewing on the curtains.

"What will you do, Daisy?" Auntie Mogs asked. "Surely you will sell your ranch."

Daisy nodded. "And I think perhaps I can get a job in the little school," she added.

"Would you like to teach?" Janet inquired wonderingly.

"Indeed I would," Daisy replied. "I love children. When my mother was alive we used to have a kindergarten of all the children from miles around. My mother was a college woman, but she loved babies, and we used to have the happiest times."

Because she was very weak, her eyes filled with tears, and Phyllis hastily changed the subject.

"I say we make a cover for that hideous old rocker in the living room," she said. "It would be easy. Just a straight piece for the front, and a straight piece for the back, and a ruffle all around the bottom."

"How about the arms?" Janet inquired.

"There aren't any, smarty. Tell you what I'll do. I'll get some newspapers and go in and cut a pattern of it."

She slipped out of the room and a few minutes later, when Beggar entered the living room, he found her on her hands and knees before a dilapidated but very comfortable chair.

"I'd give a good deal to know what you're up to," Beggar laughed, "but I suppose it won't do any good to ask?"

"Not the least bit in the world," Phyllis replied gayly. "Wait and see."

She returned to Daisy's room with a very clumsy paper pattern, carefully pinned together. They eyed it with misgiving, but Phyllis assured them that she knew exactly what she was doing, and that that was going to be her job.

She got down on the floor and struggled with it for the remainder of the afternoon.

Suddenly, in the middle of their peaceful circle, a bloodcurdling whoop rent the air.

"What under the sun is that?" Janet demanded.

Daisy turned white.

"It sounded like Tom," she said. "Oh dear, I hope it's nothing more dreadful."

Then they heard Tom's big voice calling:

"Who put pins in my favorite chair," exactly as he might have said, "Fee, Fo, Fi, Fum."

Phyllis gave a startled jump.

"My Aunt Jane's Poll-parrot, *I* did!" and when Tom rattled the handle of the door she rolled right under the bed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RANCH PUTS ON AIRS

"WHAT could be nicer. It's happened just the very way we wanted it to," Janet exclaimed, as the last of the men disappeared into the distance.

A week had passed since the last chapter, and it had been a busy one for the girls at the Twin Star Ranch. They had sewed industriously, but never where any of the men could see them, for they wanted the redecoration of the house to be a complete surprise.

This very morning at breakfast, Tom had an-

nounced that they would all be gone for the day. Everything was finished, and it seemed as if their absence was made to order.

Janet and Daisy were up and around again. They still looked a little pale and all the scratches were not healed on their faces and arms. Daisy, under Auntie Mogs' gentle care, looked happier than she had ever looked before in her life. She was perfectly at home until Tom came into the room, and then she would retire into a corner without a word to say.

Mr. Weaver had been very quietly buried in the little churchyard, and a man found to work Daisy's ranch on shares. When she spoke of applying for a position in school as school mistress, however, she met with absolutely no encouragement. "For," as Phyllis said, "we have a much better job than that for Daisy."

The last horseman was only a speck of yellow sand. Auntie Mogs turned to the girls.

"Which room shall we do first?"

"The dining room," Phyllis replied, "because then we could save the best for the last."

They went into Auntie Mogs' room. Mysterious packages had been arriving from New York all week, and the room looked like the day before Christmas.

"The curtains first," Auntie Mogs directed, and she handed a pile of curtains to Phyllis.

"We'll have to do all the hard work, dear," she said to her, "for Janet and Daisy are not strong enough."

"All right. Come along, Jan; you hold these curtains for me, and I'll hang them up; then you can tell me if they're straight enough. Auntie Mogs and Daisy can put on the slip covers."

They fell to it with a will. Phyllis hung up her first pair of curtains.

"But they're not straight," Janet insisted.

"Oh bother," Phyllis replied, "they look straight from up here. If I have to take out that nail again, I'm going on strike. I smashed my finger every time I do it."

"Perhaps the hammer's bewitched," Janet suggested, chuckling.

"Now, Jan., don't try to be funny," Phyllis warned. "I have you at my mercy," and she dangled the hammer just above Janet's head.

"The sword of Damocles," Daisy called from the other side of the room, where she was busy disguising the ugly chairs with dainty dresses.

"I think," Phyllis said impartially, "that of the two I would rather have the sword. How about you, Jan?" and she tapped Janet gently with the hammer.

Janet caught her wrist, and by a little turn she had the hammer in her own possession.

"Well, of all the impertinence!" Phyllis protested. "Give me back my staff of office."

"Never! Come down off that ladder," Janet commanded. "I'm going to hang those curtains straight."

"Never! I will not leave the ship," Phyllis protested.

There was a scrimmage, but before Auntie Mogs could protest Janet was up on the ladder, and in the twinkling of an eye the curtains hung straight and true. She hung the next pair and the next.

"Now that's finished," she exclaimed, "let's get off and see the general effect."

They went to the door and looked down the room. The morning sunshine fluttered in through the windows and the gay chintz seemed to laugh back at him.

"It's the most beautiful room I've ever seen," Daisy enthused.

"Well, I'm awfully glad *you* like it," Phyllis said, and then stopped, laughing.

"Why I?" Daisy asked, bewildered.

"Oh, er—nothing; nothing at all; I'm just glad you like it," Phyllis stammered.

"Come on, let's get José to help us put down the rug," Janet suggested hurriedly.

They found José only too delighted to help. He stood at the doorway of the dining room, his eyes and mouth wide open.

"Spirit of hillsides," he exclaimed. "Never have I seen such beauty, not even in gardens."

When he stopped enthusing he put down the soft grey-green Crex rug, and the result was indeed delightful.

"Come along, this makes me perfectly crazy to do the other room." Phyllis led the way. Auntie Mogs brought in the things and they fell to work in earnest.

The four windows along the side were hung with a pleated valence and the window seat was covered by a tufted cushion. Phyllis' slip for the rocking chair made a very brave showing.

"There's something wrong with it," she admitted, "and I don't know just what."

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"There's something wrong with it," she admitted, "and I don't know just what."

Janet was looking at the chair, and suddenly she doubled up in a fit of laughter.

"Of course," she exclaimed, "the flowers are upside down."

"Oh," Phyllis' face fell, "what shall I do?"

"Why nothing, silly; they'll never notice it in this world," Janet assured her.

"I didn't notice it myself," Daisy admitted.

They scattered pillows in all the big chairs. The rug was the same kind as the one in the dining room, and Auntie Mogs had a surprise that she had kept from the girls. Six lovely picture prints of Tom's favorites.

"Oh, Auntie Mogs, let's hang them this very minute," Janet cried.

"Please put that lovely avenue of trees over the desk."

"And the Cathedral of Rheims between the

windows. It'll get such a wonderful light," Phyllis suggested.

The pictures went up, one by one, and at last everything was finished. They stepped back to view their handy work.

"It still needs something," Phyllis complained. "What is it, Daisy?"

"Flowers," Daisy replied promptly.

"Of course," the others agreed. "Let's go and pick some."

They went out into the garden. It was just after a rain and the flowers looked as if they had just had a bath. They picked an armful of flowers and Daisy arranged them in the low quaint-shaped Indian bowls.

Then, because they had such a long time to wait before the men got home, they all went to their rooms for a nap.

"We really must look our freshest tonight in honor of José's feast," Phyllis laughed.

"And, of course, our daintiest frocks," Janet said, without thinking.

Daisy's face fell; she had no dainty frock. Her father had never seen the need of clothes for women, beyond the bare necessities.

Auntie Mogs saw and read aright her sudden look of disappointment, and she followed her into her room. In fact, she spent the greater part of the afternoon there, and the result was well worth the effort bestowed upon it.

When the boys got back it was quite late, and they went straight to their rooms for a wash-up before dinner. They were all in the best of humors, for delicious odors had been coming from the kitchen.

A few minutes before dinner the twins, in pale yellow organdy, went into the dining room and took their places. Auntie Mogs in pearl grey and Daisy—Daisy needs a paragraph to herself.

She had on the sheerest and daintiest of all

Auntie Mogs' dresses. A dimity covered with pink sprigs of roses. It was made with an old-fashioned bodice that exactly suited Daisy's quaint loveliness. Her eyes were shining with happiness, and her golden hair curled softly around her face.

She and Auntie Mogs tiptoed into the room and took their places.

"Daisy, how perfectly adorable you look!" the twins exclaimed together; and Daisy's cup of happiness overflowed.

José blew the bugle, adding several extra notes for good measure, and the boys, all unsuspecting, trooped into the room.

They stopped in amazement just inside the door, all peering over each other's shoulders. It took a good deal of persuasion on Auntie Mogs' part before they would sit down at the table.

Their remarks were characteristic, but most of them came later after dinner was over, and

they were all seated in the now doubly comfortable chairs in the living room.

"I say, it's a bit of home," English said wistfully.

"It's like a room in a moving picture play," little Circus Bailey whispered.

"Some room," was Screw Williams' contribution.

"I'll say so," Jim Martin's gentle voice drawled.

"And to think I hesitated," Beggar said in a frightened voice. "Think what we might have missed."

"Well, little lady, it's just beautiful," said Sulky.

Auntie Mogs looked at Tom.

"What do you think of it, dear?" she asked. Tom drew a long breath. "I think it's the most perfect thing I've ever seen," he answered.

He was looking straight into Daisy's eyes as he said it.

CHAPTER XVIII

MORE PLOTS

THAT night and for many days after, the boys would suddenly grow mysterious every time any of the girls came near them. Of course, they pretended a very marked indifference when they suddenly stopped talking, but it was clear to the most casual observer that there was a scheme on foot.

The twins were talking it over one night in their room.

"I do wish I knew what it was all about." (Phyllis was always curious.) "It drives me

crazy to have Beggar suddenly stop talking if I happen to come around the corner. What can they be up to?"

"I only wish I knew," Janet laughed. "It certainly gives me the creeps. Why, only today I sauntered out to the barn to see Booster"—(Booster had limped in with Daisy's horse the day after he had been let loose by Janet. One ankle was badly barked and he was being made a great fuss over by his adoring mistress)—"and I had distinctly heard all the boys arguing about something, but the very second I came around the corner they stopped short and Circus and Jim were grinning the most idiotic grins."

"Well, I suppose if we have patience we'll find out all about it. Men never can keep secrets."

"I suppose so, but I should like to know now. Phyl., do you know that we have been here for over eight weeks and that we are going home in a few more?"

"No, I don't suppose I do realize it. I feel as if I had only arrived yesterday."

"And I feel as though I had lived here all my life."

"Which amounts to the same thing really."

"I suppose so."

There was a long pause. Janet broke it.

"Phyl," she whispered.

"Yes."

"Do you suppose we will like boarding school?"

"Sure to. Look how Sally loves it, and Hilltop sounds rather nice, don't you think?"

"Yes, but I'm thinking about the girls, not the place."

"Well; what about them?"

"Oh, I don't know, but they're sure to be different."

"What's the use of worrying, anyway?" Phyllis gave a sleepy little yawn and put out her

hand to find Janet's. "We have each other," she said softly.

It was a sign that the visit was nearing its end when the twins looked forward and made plans.

The next morning the mystery deepened. Several cowmen from nearby ranches came over and joined in the talk which always stopped if the twins or Daisy or Auntie Mogs came in sight. In fact, the boys showed marked inhospitality towards their guests and tried to hide them behind grain boxes when the girls were near.

It is difficult to hide six feet of man and usually a foot or a hand betrayed them. A Mr. Hunt from the XYZ came just at lunch time and Tom had to ask him to lunch. He introduced him as a business friend who had come over on a very important matter. They even made a pretence of talking business at the table while the rest looked grave and nodded their heads wisely at set intervals.

But it was all delightful play-acting and the twins could not look at each other for fear of laughing and spoiling it all.

After luncheon, things began to materialize. Beggar asked Phyllis in the most offhand way if she would not go for a ride with him.

"Of course I will, Beggar; I'd love to," Phyllis replied quite naturally.

"Good; and let's get an early start. How about three o'clock?" Beggar suggested.

Phyllis nodded. She did not trust herself to speak.

"At the barn, then," he called over his shoulder as he left the house.

"I'll be there," Phyllis promised.

On the other side of the veranda English was talking to Janet.

"I say, it's a jolly afternoon for a ride. Let's have one," he suggested.

"Love to," Janet told him.

"Righto; and meet me at three-thirty at the barn."

Janet nodded, but when English was out of sight she dashed for her room and found Phyllis rolled up in a ball in the bed, laughing.

"The plot thickens," Janet announced. "I'm to meet English at three-thirty."

"Just for a little ride, I suppose," Phyllis laughed.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm to meet Beggar at three-thirty."

"I wonder if they don't think we suspect."

"Indeed they don't, and I wouldn't have them guess that we did for the world."

"Let's go and find out when Auntie Mogs and Daisy are going," Phyllis suggested, getting up.

They dropped out of their window and were soon under Auntie Mogs'. They found Daisy with her.

"My dears," Auntie Mogs announced, without

giving them a chance to ask questions, "I'm going for an automobile ride with Jim Martin. He thinks it's a beautiful day that it would be a shame to spend it indoors."

"Tom is going to take me over to the cabin. He thinks he ought to see the man who is working my land for me," added Daisy.

They all laughed heartily for a minute, and then Auntie Mogs said gravely:

"Bless their hearts. They are having such a good time surprising us that we must be very careful not to let them guess that we know."

"What time are you going?" Phyllis inquired.

"Three-fifteen, at the corral gates," Daisy replied.

"I'm leaving at four," Auntie Mogs told them.

"Well, the least we could do is to wear our very best riding habits," Janet announced. "Come along, Phyl," let's go and prink."

CHAPTER XIX

A WESTERN BARBECUE

THEY went back to their room, and when three o'clock came, Phyllis, as the leader of the procession, went down to meet Beggar looking as though she might be going for a ride in Central Park.

They started off, to be followed fifteen minutes' later by Tom and Daisy, who rode off in the other direction.

Janet had watched them depart from behind drawn shades, and now it was her turn.

"I say, you do look nice," English greeted her,

as she tripped down the steps in her shining top boots and snowy clean habit.

They rode off in still another direction.

Auntie Mogs left in the automobile at four o'clock.

They all met other couples, and as they neared the foothills they saw a gorge filled with beautiful wild flowers. People were riding in from every direction.

The twins recognized each other simultaneously, and waved.

"Isn't this exciting!" Janet shouted.

"I should say it is," Phyllis called back. "Were you ever so surprised in your life?"

"Never!" Janet answered emphatically.

In a measure this was true, for as they watched the people collecting from every direction they could not help being surprised. It looked as though the world and his wife were there.

"It's going to be a lark," Beggar announced.

"There are the Bundy bunch. They've had a long ride."

Janet looked about her at the assembling hordes, and then at English.

"But what is it?" she demanded. "Surely this isn't just a picnic."

"I should say not," Beggar answered her. "It's a real sure-enough barbecue. When the Twin Stars entertains they do it right. Isn't that so, English?"

"Righto!" English nodded.

"But you don't mean that this is our party?" Phyllis asked in amazement.

"It's yours," English explained. "You see, you are the Twin Stars. Tom named his ranch for you; and, of course, it's the right thing to give a proper party in your honor."

Just then Auntie Mogs drove up in the car.

The twins did not give her a chance to get out before they poured the amazing facts into her ears.

A few minutes' later the rest of the outfit joined them, and they dismounted. After that the whole evening was a dream to the girls, and they met people and shook hands until their arms were lame.

They stood in the choicest spot of a huge circle that was boarded off, and watched the cowmen from all over the country ride bucking broncos in a contest. And to their joy they saw their own outfit carry off all the honors. They saw girls their own age doing things that they never dreamed could be done on the back of a horse outside the circus.

Then they sat down to a feast for which whole pigs had been roasted, and after dinner they heard rough cowmen with beautiful voices sing all the songs they loved. Under flaring torches they danced the Virginia reel.

The fun was so fast and furious that it was not until dinner time that the twins missed Tom and Daisy.

"Where under the sun do you suppose they are?" Phyllis demanded.

"Oh, they're somewhere about," Janet assured them.

And then they saw them riding in from the south, their horses very close together and their own heads bowed in earnest conversation.

They were not the only ones who saw them approaching. Someone recognized Tom and started to cheer. It was taken up by a hundred others and sounded and resounded through the hills.

Tom stood up in the saddle and waved his hat. Then he and Daisy dismounted and they were soon lost to the twins' view, for a crowd surrounded them at once, and they did not see them again until later in the evening.

After the Virginia reel, Janet slipped away. She had eaten too much dinner and she wanted to be alone. She climbed up a steep rock and

almost fell asleep lying looking up at the stars, when she heard voices beneath her.

She was in a position where she could see and not be seen. The voices were very soft. Suddenly, Janet sat up very straight. From out of the darkness a voice clear and distinct had said:

"Daisy, my darling, tell me that you love me," and another voice equally distinct had answered shyly:

"I do love you, Tommy."

Janet slipped noiselessly from the rock and went back to Phyllis and the others.

Under cover of the noise of the singing she managed to whisper into Phyllis's ear:

"It's all right about Daisy and Tom."

"How do you know?" Phyllis asked excitedly.

"Because I heard it," Janet answered back, and Phyllis had to be content until they were alone at home that night.

CHAPTER XX

THE WEDDING

THE weeks that followed the never-to-be-forgotten barbecue were busy ones at the Twin Star Ranch. Tom and Daisy were going to be married almost at once.

The first thing that Auntie Mogs did was to take Daisy up to Chicago for a week to buy her trousseau. The twins stayed at the ranch and every day something exciting was sure to happen.

Girls of their own age came in from different ranches to see them. They rode and it is to be

feared that Janet, in her endeavor to ride like them, had many a mishap and, as English put it, "she came a cropper." But Janet never minded learning a lesson, and, as Sulky pointed out, she never had to learn the same one twice.

On the day that Auntie Mogs and Daisy were expected home, Phyllis drove the car into Loophole to meet them, and Janet sat beside her. They stopped at the general store, for Tom had some things to buy.

"Here's where I win my lolly-pops," Phyllis laughed. "Come along in, Janet, and see if he can guess which is which."

"How about the scratch on my face?" Janet demanded.

"Oh, that's gone ages ago," Phyllis assured her.

They went into the store. Mr. Hartley was waiting on some customers, but he turned from them at once at sight of the twins, and rushed to them, his hands outstretched.

"So you're both here at last," he said.

He was so huge that Janet almost stepped back in sheer fright as he advanced towards them.

"Well, which is which?" they both asked together. Their smiles were identical, their clothes the same and their voice both had the same bell-toned quality.

Mr. Hartley threw up his hands in despair and stampeded back to his counter again, returning with both hands full of lollypops.

"As I don't know which young lady I had the bet with, I will pay it to both, and deem it a privilege," he said courteously.

"Oh, thanks ever so much, they're much too much. Really they are," the twins protested.

Tom called them from the door to say that it was time to go to the train, and Mr. Hartley ushered them to it affably. They left with the lollypops.

Auntie Mogs and Daisy were the first ones

on the platform, and their welcome was all that they could have wished.

"We've missed you awfully," Janet began.

"Did you have a good time?" Phyllis interrupted.

"Did you like Chicago, Daisy?"

"We've had a ripping time since you left."

"The Bundy girls came to see us and stayed all night."

"And Jan. fell off a horse because she would try to pick up a handkerchief from the ground."

"Well, you would see if the car would go fifty, and do look what she did to the fender."

"Children, do stop talking." Auntie Mogs held up her hands in horror. "I think it's high time I came home."

"I think so too," said Daisy demurely, looking at Tom.

"I'm sure of it," he replied, squeezing her hand.

They rode back to the ranch, where the boys gave them a roaring welcome.

Janet and Phyllis divided their lollypops.

The date of the wedding was set that night. It was to be just one week off. Phyllis and Janet dragged Daisy to her room as soon as her trunks came, and made her show them her pretty new things. Then they sat down on the bed, one on either side of her.

"Daisy, you're changed," Phyllis announced.

"What is it?"

"Happiness, and pretty clothes," laughed Daisy.

"No; you're older," Janet looked at her judiciously.

"Perhaps," Daisy nodded. "I feel as if I've grown up all of a sudden."

"Well, you have, I expect," Phyllis said wisely. "I suppose you do when you're buying trousseaux."

"Funny thing," Janet mused. "Before you went away I always felt as if I were years and years older than you. Now I feel as if I am lots younger."

"That's exactly what I mean," Phyllis agreed.

Daisy looked at their puzzled faces, and laughed heartily.

"I don't care how old or how young you think me," she said, "as long as you always love me."

"Oh, we'll always do that," Janet promised.

"Didn't we make the match?" Phyllis inquired.

Daisy looked at her in surprise.

"Did you want me to marry Tom?"

"Why, of course we did, you silly," the twins answered together.

Daisy kissed them each and her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't see what makes everybody so good to me," she said.

Phyllis kissed her in return.

"You goose," she said.

"It's because you are Daisy," Janet explained; and, somehow, the explanation seemed highly satisfactory.

The day of the wedding found Janet and Phyllis up with the dawn, and they picked flowers steadily until breakfast time, and Beggar and English helped them.

"Have you got just loads of rice ready?" Janet inquired. "We really want to shower them with it."

"Don't worry," Beggar told her, "we have loads of it, and all the boys have their own private stock."

They banked the flowers in every conceivable corner of the house.

The wedding was to be at noon, and they were having a late breakfast. Daisy was in her room, for Auntie Mogs insisted that the groom should not see his bride until the ceremony.

"That's the silliest superstition I've ever heard," Tom said, "but if you say so, Auntie Mogs, it's all right."

"Think you can live that long," Jim Martin teased, and Tom grinned, but he was nervous a minute later.

"For mercy sake, English," he said, "as my best man, be sure not to forget the ring."

Janet was looking at Circus Bailey, as Tom spoke, and she distinctly saw him wink at Screw Williams.

"Don't worry, old chap; I'll have it safe and sound," English replied confidently.

This time it was Screw Williams who winked.

Janet knew that something was wrong, so after breakfast she called English out into the corral.

"English, are you sure you've got the ring?" she inquired.

English looked at her questioningly, and she explained the exchanged winks.

"Wait here," English said; "I'll not be a minute," and he hurried into the house, to return a minute later with the news that the ring was gone.

"I left it on my box, and of course they've hidden it."

"Don't say a word about it," Janet warned. "I may be able to find where they've hidden it, and then the joke will be on them."

English nodded and left her.

What happened next was pure luck. Janet saw the two conspirators coming towards her, and she jumped into the barn and hid behind the big door, which was only half open.

Screw and Circus came to a standstill not a foot from her on the other side of the door.

"Where did you hide it?" Screw inquired.

"In my pillow sham, 'way in the corner. They'll never find it."

"How long are you going to tease him."

"Until five minutes before the ceremony."

"Bet he doesn't turn a hair," Screw remarked.

"Bet he does."

"How much?"

"Ten bucks."

"Done!"

They walked away and Janet danced out into the sunshine.

"Poor Circus, I'm afraid he'll lose his ten dollars."

"English," she called softly, and English stepped down from the drawing-room window.

"In Circus Bailey's pillow slip," she said, and had you been watching her you would have thought she was discussing the weather.

"Thanks awfully, little pal," he answered, and he slipped back into the house.

Daisy made the most beautiful bride. She wore a soft white dress and veil, and the dead whiteness seemed to enrich her naturally vivid color.

Tom was a handsome groom. His usually merry eyes had a grave tender look in them, as he waited before the minister for Daisy to come to him.

The twins were Daisy's attendants, and they carried huge bunches of flowers and wore pale pink dresses.

There was a gasp of surprise from Screw and Circus when the minister asked for the ring. English gave it to him in the calm way which he did everything.

Janet almost laughed when she heard Screw say in a harsh tone that he fondly hoped was a whisper:

"I win."

The simplicity and beauty of the words of the marriage ceremony filled the pretty living room. It was crowded with people, for Tom was a great favorite, and a little sigh of perfect contentment ran through them all as, with hands raised the minister ended with the words:

"Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

The twins looked up, their eyes full of tears, happy tears.

"We haven't lost Tommy," Phyllis whispered.

"Or course not; we've gained Daisy," Janet answered.

CHAPTER XXI

STARTING EAST

THE train pulled out of Loophole at four o'clock in the afternoon, and on the particular day of the twins' departure, the platform was crowded with people. All the outfit of the Twin Star were there, with Tom and Daisy, just returned from their wedding trip.

Janet and Phyllis stood on the back platform with Auntie Mogs.

"Good-bye, Beggar; don't forget, you promised to write," Phyllis called.

Janet leaned down and shook English's hand once more; then she turned to Sulky.

"Goodbye, Uncle Pete," she whispered. "I'll be sure and give Peter all your messages."

Sulky squeezed her little hand hard.

"Goodbye, little lady," he said. "Goodbye, and the best of luck."

The train pulled slowly out of the station as if it sympathized and would fain linger for more farewells, but at last with a sorry cough it lumbered on its way.

When the station was out of sight they went in and sat down in the coach. Auntie Mogs' observant eye saw traces of tears.

"All aboard for the next big adventure," she said briskly. "Boarding school. Suppose we begin by deciding what clothes you'd better have."

THE END.

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